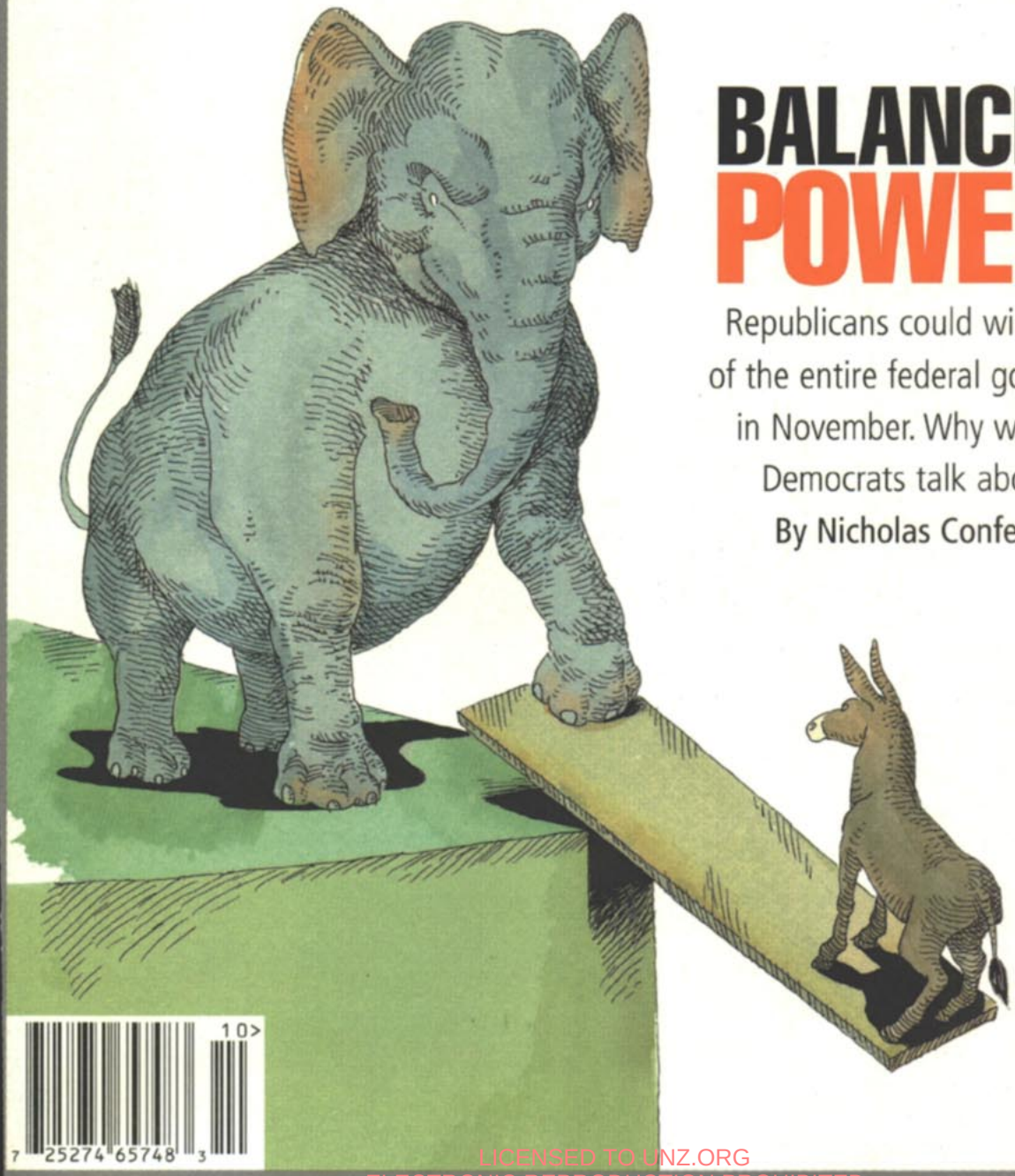
The Washington Monthly

October 2002
$4.50
Can. $5.50

Why the National Mall Needs a Food Court

Gen X Nostalgia

Anti-Spanish Snobbery



BALANCE OF POWER?

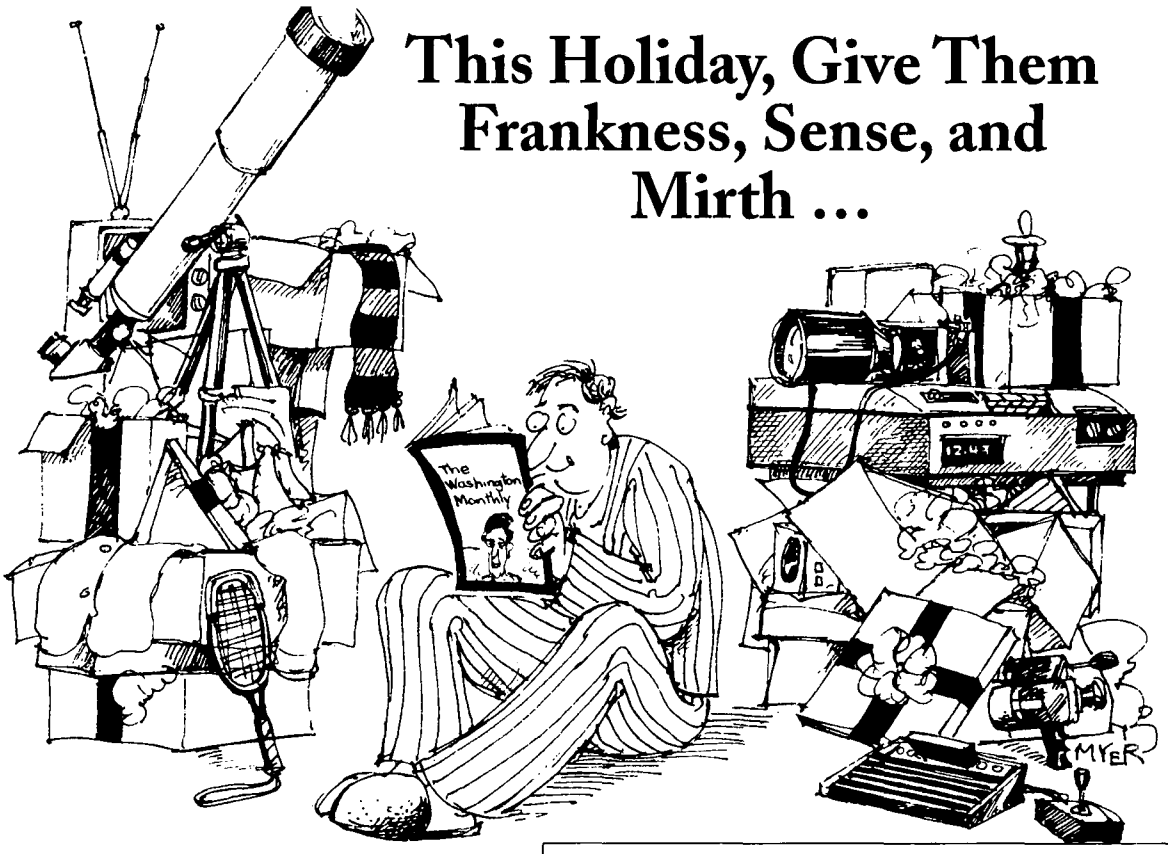
Republicans could win control of the entire federal government in November. Why won't the Democrats talk about it?

By Nicholas Confessore

10>
7 25274 65748 3

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This Holiday, Give Them Frankness, Sense, and Mirth ...



Long after the fruitcake has gone stale, ***The Washington Monthly*** will keep arriving, fresh and stimulating. You won't have to stand in line with the rest of the holiday shoppers at a department store to get it or take it back in two weeks because it's broken.

Give everyone on your list something they can really use. Now you can share ***The Washington Monthly*** with friends at a great price! You get the first subscription for $26, then every additional subscription for only $20!

SPECIAL HOLIDAY GIFT OFFER

First gift or your own renewal is $26; each additional subscription is just $20. (Add $10 for Canadian or foreign subscriptions.)

Please send a 1-year subscription (10 issues) as my gift to:

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State ____ ZIP ____

Gift Card Message _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State ____ ZIP ____

Gift Card Message _____

Donor Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State ____ ZIP ____

☐ Payment Enclosed $____ ☐ Bill Me Later

Charge my: ☐ VISA ☐ Mastercard

Account # _____ Exp ____

Signature _____

A2A01

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Contents

The Washington Monthly

Volume 34, Number 10 • October 2002

Features

4 **Tilting at Windmills**
Market Chic ... Meritocratic Mating ... 42's 43 percent ... Refinancing the Redskins ... Sitting Around Soda Fountains ...
BY CHARLES PETERS

8 **Monumental Failure**
Why we should commercialize the National Mall.
BY JOSHUA GREEN

13 **The Parent Gap**
What Arnold Schwarzenegger can teach politicians about winning swing voters.
BY KAREN KORNBLUH

18 **Bad Press**
How business journalism helped inflate the bubble.
BY PHILLIP J. LONGMAN

22 COVER STORY
One Vote Away
Republicans could win control of the entire federal government in November. So why won't Democrats talk about it?
BY NICHOLAS CONFESSORE

Art by Wesley Bedrosian

30 **Money for Nothing**
States are finally collecting money from deadbeat dads. Now, if they'd only get it to the moms.
BY SANDY BERGO

38 **Spanish Disquisition**
Or, how a bookish Gringa learned to stop worrying and love el idioma.
BY LIESL SCHILLINGER

43 **Reality Bites**
Why He-Man, Care Bears, and Miami Vice are making a comeback.
BY COURTNEY RUBIN

On Political Books

46 **Party Hardy**
Most Americans agree with Democrats. But will they vote for them?
BY KENNETH S. BAER

50 **Why We Eat**
The science of obesity.
BY STEPHANIE MENCIMER

53 Political Booknotes

Starr Lite
TONY MAURO reviews KENNETH W. STARR'S *First Among Equals.*

Case Dismissed
STEPHEN POMPER reviews CATHERINE CRIER'S *The Case Against Lawyers.*

Mountain of Evidence
ALEX STONE reviews DANIEL WILKINSON'S *Silence on the Mountain.*

Primer Beef
ANDREW J. ROTHERHAM reviews JONATHAN ZIMMERMAN'S *Whose America.*

Disturbing Behavior
ANA MARIE COX reviews ANNE HENDERSHOTT'S *The Politics of Deviance.*

Turnout Smackdown
BRENT KENDALL reviews THOMAS PATTERSON'S *The Vanishing Voter.*

Chain Store Blues
AMIA SRINIVASAN reviews PETER BIRKELAND'S *Franchising Dreams.*

Departments

2 Letters
28 Monthly Journalism Award
32 Who's Who?
37 Tidbits & Outrages

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Letters

Ain't Easy Being Green

Stephanie Mencimer may be correct in her premise that Al Gore could be elected president in 2004 if he adopts an environmentalist platform ("Weather 'tis Nobler in the Mind," July/August), but she offers no reason to believe Gore would ever do so.

In thousands of hours of pounding pavement on behalf of a dozen Green candidates, including myself, I have never heard anyone coherently answer my perennial question: What has Gore done in public life to indicate that he has even read, let alone understood, *Earth in the Balance*?

On the contrary: He pledged, on behalf of his running mate in 1992, that the Clinton administration would block EPA licensing of the world's largest toxic waste incinerator, several hundred feet from the elementary school in East Liverpool, Ohio. That was one of the first promises President Clinton broke; the Democrats had accepted five-figure contributions from the incinerator's parent company. Now children in East Liverpool are contracting rare types of eyeball cancer.

It will take a lot of crass revisionism to obscure the fact that a vote for Gore is a vote for cancer; for inaction on the modest Kyoto Protocol; for dismissal of regional EPA heads who had the temerity to scrutinize pollution permits; for dutiful silence when Clinton broke his promise to veto the Gorton Amendment suspending environmental protection in our national forests; for a foreign policy fixated on underpriced oil; for socialization of private companies' radioactive waste (and the liability for it); and, above all, for the radical deregulation of trade in which G.H.W. Bush, Clinton, Dan Quayle, and Gore all colluded, empowering the World Trade Organization to prevent environmental protection altogether. Why should we now expect this guy to develop any credibility on environmental issues?

MIKE LIVINGSTON
Takoma Park, Md.

I shake my head whenever I see the media on the left deconstruct Al Gore's campaign. It seems as if they think that Gore was running in a vacuum. There was no consideration of the subtle positioning required of a Democrat in a resoundingly Republican media culture. Gore's reluctance to expose his environmental message to the media vultures was, as far as I was concerned, a matter of pragmatism. The mainstream media still had its claws out from the Clinton impeachment and was ready to dig into any liberal ideas. I felt that Gore was wise to protect his precious environmental message from right-wing screams of "Extremism," and "Stale '60s rhetoric" that would have inundated mainstream TV.

What surprised me most about that election year was the amazingly virulent attacks on Gore from the left. I had subscriptions to *The Nation*, *The Progressive*, and *In These Times*. After months of extreme frustration from reading the constant attacks on Gore (without any real dissection of Bush and his platform) I had to terminate all three subscriptions. I think that if the left-leaning punditry could have expressed any positive reportage about Gore, he would have won in a landslide.

And until the Green Party can muster something beyond petulant attacks against progressives like Sen. Paul Wellstone (D-Minn.), they cannot be taken seriously by anyone concerned with the disaster that is the Bush Administration. It is time to get serious about the future of our country and to get positive about Al Gore. His environmental passion is still strong and most of all, he has been proven prophetic about what would happen if George W. Bush won.

MARK THOMPSON
Duvall, Wash.

Sadly, blame for mishandling of the environment is—along with corporate malfeasance—equally shared by members of both parties in Congress. Remember that it was Rep. John Dingell, looking out for his Michigan constituency, who helped block improved vehicle emission standards this past spring.

Still, Gore's environmental background is something that could help him overcome Bush's biggest electoral strength: namely, the view that he is the right person to defend the nation against terrorist activity. In particular, Gore's knowledge of environmental issues and his experience with them gives him a blueprint to show to the nation as a way out of our dependence on foreign oil and the extremists that dependence spawns. While his environmental views may not appease the most virulent of hawks looking to take on Saddam Hussein, it does provide a vision for U.S. citizens who want a better future for their children than more drilling in Alaska can create.

JIM ALLEN
Scottsville, Va.

Take a Vow

In her article ("Vow-To Books," July/August), Lynda McDonnell writes, "even Wilson rejects the popular conservative notion that government can fix the problem by making ... marriage more financially attractive." Although I am not able to respond with statistics, personal experience leads me to believe that government (and the taxpayers who put them in power) can indeed improve the family by making marriage more financially attractive.

Tax policies which reward married couples raising multiple children can give these families the gift of time. Used well, this time could be spent on family dinners and debates, on games and silliness, on reading and singing. Most importantly, there would be time for nurturing love and respect within the family. This all comes inexpensively, with only small sacrifices in living standards required.

At home in France, our family enjoys these benefits. Singles and childless couples subsidize this lifestyle. And yes, it is costly for them. But most have recognized that healthy, well-adapted and productive children are critical to the future health of the society. The policies of the French government and the sacrifices of its taxpayers make this possible. We are thankful to them and hope their trust in us is well placed.

RAY DEVRIES
Colmar, France

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

White and Wrong

Kudos to Joshua Green for a superb and unsettling peak into the seemingly insurmountable sleaze of the Bush administration. ("The 'Gate-less Community," July/August) Those good ol' boys—awash in oil, money, graft, and slick bookkeeping—are turning out to be more crooked than the crookedest two-bit Texan card shark. Enron, Andersen, and the fiscal collapse of a panoply of big-name corporations may not all be as "scandalous" as the Lewinsky affair and Whitewater, but one would think there'd be just a little bit of a shake-up. Maybe this inertia is due to the timidity of many elected Democratic officials—not to mention the timidity, even the deliberate ignorance, of many of Green's fellow members of the Fourth Estate.

JOE MARTIN
Seattle, Wash.

Disease Controlled

Nicholas Thompson writes, "When a mysterious virus popped up in New Mexico a few years ago, scientists had little idea how to respond until realizing that its sequence closely matched a group of viruses endemic to Asia found in GenBank." ("May the Source Be With You," July/August)

Not so. The folks at CDC figured it out first in the wet labs using antibodies from serum of people infected with related viruses. Only later did they confirm the findings with similarity studies to the sequences of the virus.

However, Thompson's point is well taken. The HCV, HEV, and HGV Hepatitis viruses were each discovered by similarity studies of the nucleotide sequences.

KIRK FRY
via email

Nicholas Thompson responds: Kirk Fry is correct that the very first evidence implicating the virus came from antibodies isolated from the initial disease victims, and I erred in suggesting otherwise. However, after the initial isolation, GenBank played the crucial role of helping to determine whether this was a new disease or an old virus that had evolved a new pathogenicity. There are certainly many other examples of GenBank's importance, and Mr. Fry suggests three good ones.

Read It and Weep

Let's just put aside the opening of the "Coulter Clash" review (July/August), in which Jamie Malanowski takes the usual swipes at the Ann Coulter's personal appearance, and concentrate, instead, on the article's closing paragraph. "Anybody can be snide," he writes. "Anybody can be small, and mean, and disdainful. Coulter's especially good at it. The American people were tired of this bickering and this partisanship before September 11, and they understand completely that it serves no purpose whatsoever in our present predicament. We can no longer afford to luxuriate in insipid gamesmanship. Coulter's book is a waste of time."

What a hypocrite. Our conservative-bashing journalist only proves Ann Coulter's entire point: that America's biased, left-leaning journalists are hell-bent on dismissing the attitudes, and squelching the voices, of conservatives. "Coulter's book is a waste of time," he writes. But in his suggestion that one would, therefore, be foolish to bother reading it, you just succeeded in perfectly demonstrating how very dead-on-the-money Ms. Coulter's thesis is.

CAROLINE BLACK
New York, N.Y.

CORRECTION:

In "Weather 'tis Nobler in the Mind" (July/August), Stephanie Mencimer wrote, "As a senator, Gore was the only Democrat to vote in favor of the Gulf War." In fact, ten Democratic senators voted in favor of the use of force resolution on January 12, 1991: Gore, John Breaux, Richard Bryan, Bob Graham, Howell Heflin, J. Bennett Johnston, Joe Lieberman, Harry Reid, Charles Robb, and Richard Shelby. (Shelby switched to the Republican Party in 1994.)

The Washington Monthly

Editor in Chief Paul Glastris
Publisher and President Markos Kounalakis

Founding Editor Charles Peters
Editors Joshua Green, Stephanie Mencimer, Nicholas Confessore
Business Manager Claire Iseli
Associate Publisher Christina Larson
Contributing Editors Jonathan Alter, Thomas N. Bethell, Tom Bethell, Katherine Boo, Taylor Branch, Matthew Cooper, Michelle Cottle, Gregg Easterbrook, James Fallows, Mickey Kaus, Phil Keisling, Michael Kinsley, Nicholas Lemann, Suzannah Lessard, Arthur Levine, Jon Meacham, Matthew Miller, Timothy Noah, Joseph Nocera, Leonard Reed, John Rothchild, Jonathan Rowe, David Segal, Walter Shapiro, Joshua Wolf Shenk, Nicholas Thompson, Steven Waldman, Robert Worth
Editorial Advisory Board Charles W. Bailey, Russell Baker, James David Barber, Edgar Cahn, David Halberstam, Richard Reeves, Hugh Sidey
Design Consultant Jandos Rothstein
Interns Brent Kendall, Soyoung Ho, Amia Srinivasan
Proof-readers Sally Cutler
Fact-checker Timothy Dickinson

Subscription rates: U.S. and possessions: one year, $44.95; two years, $79.95; three years, $109.95. For Canadian and foreign subscriptions, add $10 for surface delivery; air mail delivery add $32.

For subscription questions and address changes, please call our subscription fullfillment department at (815) 734-5817, or send an email to service@washingtonmonthly.com. For address changes, please provide six weeks' notice.

The Washington Monthly is indexed in the Book Review Index, Political Science Abstracts, Public Affairs Information Service, the Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature, and Ulrich's International Periodicals Directory and may be obtained on microfilm from University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, MI 48106.

Published monthly except combined Jan./Feb. and July/Aug. issues by The Washington Monthly Co., 733 15th St. NW, Suite 1000, Washington, DC 20005. Printed in U.S.A.

© 2002 The Washington Monthly Co. All rights reserved.
ISSN 0043-0633.
Reproduction without permission is prohibited. For reprint rights call Christina Larson at (202) 393-5155.

Postmaster: Send change of address to *The Washington Monthly*, 733 15th St. NW, Suite 1000, Washington, DC 20005. Periodicals postage paid at Washington, D.C. and at additional mailing offices.

Visit *The Washington Monthly* online:
www.washingtonmonthly.com

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Tilting at Windmills

By Charles Peters

Market Chic • Meritocratic Mating • Refinancing the Redskins
43's 42 percent • Sitting Around Soda Fountains

The owners of the Washington Redskins appear to be exploring the frontiers of capitalism in a way that does not seem sporting. They are refinancing $500 million in club debt with a $700-million loan. Why should I object? After all, they are probably seeking lower interest rates, just like thousands of other Americans. True, but it's the explanation of the increase from $500 to $700 million that I find a bit dicey. "The difference between the old debt package," we discover in the ninth paragraph of a story about the transaction in *The Washington Times*, "will go to [Dan] Snyder and his investors—father Gerald, sister Michelle, and [*U.S. News & World Report* publisher] Fred Drasner—as personal loans." Ppersonal loans for the owners! Wouldn't it be better for fans if the $200 million was used to lower the painfully high ticket prices they pay to see the Redskins?

The first Bush administration was controlling the White House press corps' agenda, deciding what issues were to be emphasized each day and relegating to the back burner all other matters, however important they might have been. So wrote James Bennet, now of *The New York Times*, in our November 1991 issue. The article caused enough embarrassment in the media that it almost immediately ceased to be true, and remained untrue during the last year of Bush I and the entire Clinton presidency. But its validity resumed under Bush II and gained strength from the surge of patriotism in the media after 9/11. This spring, however, stories of corporate malfeasance began to threaten the White House's control. You can imagine Karl Rove's worry when stories began to focus on participation by the president and vice president in questionable business practices. So they have given us Iraq, which has proved to be gloriously successful in pushing everything else off the front pages, including pressing domestic problems that desperately need the nation's attention. As we go to press, some Democrats seem to be catching on to what's happening, but it remains to be seen whether or when the press and the public will wake up.

We thought we had found the last of the great expense-accounters with the Petrus gang featured here last month, but just after we went to press, we learned about Michael Murphy, a lawyer in Coral Gables, Fla. He is accused of spending $111,000 on prostitutes and, according to *The Washington Post*, billing them to a client as "routine litigation expenses."

"A cigarette in the hands of a Hollywood star onscreen is a gun aimed at a 12- or 14-year-old," writes Joe Eszterhas, a prominent screenwriter who started smoking at 12 because he "wanted so very much to be cool" and whose recent throat cancer cost him much of his larynx. When smoking is written into or made a part of a scene by a writer or director, it is justified on the ground of "creative freedom" and "artistic expression," writes Eszterhas, who then nails the real reason on the head: "laziness." I've made this point before, but Eszterhas makes it better, and he speaks with the authority of an insider and former sinner. "The truth is, there are 1,000 better and more original ways to reveal a character's personality."

Have you noticed that the word "capitalism" is now back in vogue? It had nearly vanished when the "market" was chic. It appears that people like to use "capitalism" when they're attacking the system and "markets" when they're advocating or defending it.

In the course of doing research on a book about events that took place in 1940, I have been delving into newspapers of the era. Not surprisingly, I found a good many examples for the How Times Have Changed Department. One example is that, back then, you could buy a new car—Ford, Chevrolet, or Plymouth—for less than $700. But my favorite is an International News Service article that quotes a physical education expert, Dr. Jay Nash, on "why young people today are such a bunch of softies." Said Nash, "Instead of obtaining stimulation from work, the young people of today are to be found sitting around soda fountains devouring ice cream sodas."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

IS THERE A "HOUSING BUBBLE"? Have escalating real estate prices created a danger akin to the stock market bubble that burst last year? I am definitely no expert, but I do recognize one troubling sign: refinancing homeowners are pressing appraisers for high estimates of their homes' value, so that, like the Redskins owners, they can increase the amount of their loans. "Appraisers from around the country say homeowners are increasingly urging them to jack up the estimated prices of their homes," reports Sheila Muto of *The Wall Street Journal.* Those of us who remember the 1980s know that inflated appraisals were a significant factor in the savings and loan scandal. When real estate prices declined, the inflated appraisals were exposed. Borrowers who had to sell at lower prices could not repay their loans. The S&Ls that had made the loans either went under or were bailed out by the taxpayers.

THE DEFECTS IN THE BUSH EDUcation bill are beginning to show. As Alexander Russo made clear in our September issue and *The New York Times* recently confirmed, the right the bill was supposed to confer on parents to transfer their children from failing schools has turned out to be illusory. There just isn't enough room in the good schools for those who want to transfer.

Another difficulty with the bill, this one pointed out by *The Washington Post*, is that the definition of a failing school is left to the states. The *Post* found one school in Arkansas where only 10 percent of the students were proficient in English, but which the state still managed to avoid classifying as "failing."

MARK KNOWLER OF CBS RADIO is the media's unofficial keeper of presidential statistics. His findings were recently reported by *The Washington Post*'s Dana Milbank. Two of them might be of particular interest to you. W. has spent 250 days—42 percent of his presidency—at Camp David, Kennebunkport, or his Texas ranch. He has held only six solo press conferences during the first 19 months of his presidency. His handlers must quail at the prospect of having the quality of his mind exposed to the world. Recall how frequently confident presidents like FDR and JFK met with the press—FDR did it twice a week.

Bush's handlers must quail at the prospect of having the quality of his mind exposed to the world.

EVEN IF YOUR INDIGNATION threshold is high, your blood may heat up when you learn that Merrill Lynch will probably be able to deduct from its taxable income the $100 million it paid to settle the New York at-torney general's charge that it hyped stocks it knew were losers in order to please big corporate clients. The key to getting the tax deduction, explains *The Wall Street Journal*'s John D. McKinnon, is having the agreement defined not as a fine, but as a civil settlement, as Merrill Lynch succeeded in doing. "It's a subsidy for corporate wrongdoing," says a prominent tax attorney.

ONE OF THE MORE UNFORTUnate aspects of the Cold War was the tendency of American foreign policy makers to ally us with any dictator who shared our distaste for the Commies. Now it appears that we are falling into the same pattern in the war against terrorism. Pakistan is a notable example. Now comes Indonesia. Three years ago we cut our ties with that county's armed forces after they had slaughtered hundreds of people in East Timor. Now, reports Karen DeYoung of *The Washington Post*, "The administration is renewing the military training despite scant evidence that the Indonesian army has substantively investigated and punished the human rights abuses that led to the cutoff."

SOME OF YOU will recall that in 1969, the nation was shocked to learn that 155 individuals and couples with incomes of $200,000 or more paid no tax. As a result, Congress passed the alternative minimum tax that was supposed to eliminate this problem. But now *The New York Times*' David Cay Johnston reports that in 1999 —the last year for which figures are available—2,250 individuals and couples paid no federal income tax, even though they had incomes in excess of $200,000. The alternative minimum tax shouldn't be abolished, as Bush proposed to do, but it clearly needs fixing. Too many people who should be covered are escaping. And too many people are covered who shouldn't be. For example, the tax can apply to a single parent making only $28,000, while most of those making more than $600,000 avoid it.

DICK CHENEY'S HALLIBURTON problem may not go away. The evidence shows that while he was the company's chief executive officer, its accounting was changed to show certain uncollected payments as income, instead of losses as the company had treated them and as common sense would indicate. Did Cheney know about the accounting change? The answer is yes, according to the company's present CEO, David Lesar. Was the change disclosed to investors at the time? Only if we accept as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

disclosure the kind of fine-print whisper perfected by Enron and Arthur Andersen.

YOU MAY RECALL THAT OVER the years there have been a good many reports of airport employees smuggling dope onto planes while they're engaged in routine maintenance, cleaning, and re-stocking of food and beverages. But suppose, asked a recent Learning Channel documentary about airport security, the employee is told he is being handed a bag of dope and it actually is Semtex or some other explosive? He will still think he is only supplementing his income by doing something naughty but relatively harm-less—and the result could be catastrophic.

One has to wonder what the unanticipated consequences of our invasion of Iraq will be.

ANDREW FASTOW, THE ENRON CFO who devised all those lovely schemes to enrich himself and other Enron executives, had a Lucite cube on his desk. Its different sides explained the company's values. One, according to *The Wall Street Journal*, said, "When Enron says it's going to 'rip your face off,' it will 'rip your face off.'"

SPEAKING OF ENRON, IT AND other corporate scandals do seem to have restrained the Bush administration's mad rush to deregulate practically everything. Consider the case of Michael Powell, the chairman on the Federal Communications Commission. In March, as part of that mad rush, he disbanded the agency's Accounting Safeguard Division and announced a reduction in the amount of information companies must supply to the agency. But in April he "placed a moratorium on any relaxation of the rules," according to *The Washington Post*'s Christopher Stern, and told a Senate committee that the financial scandals are causing him to "question" his deregulatory zeal.

THE LATEST CALENDAR OF "Coming Attractions" from the local Vassar Club lists six events. Four are for "Over 30 Ivy Singles," hosted respectively by MIT, Stanford, Yale, and Bryn Mawr. But one, the Scholarship Benefits Lecture, shows that the alums have not totally forsaken the life of the mind. And the last event, a New York Yankees versus Baltimore Orioles game, demonstrates that they are willing to mix with the masses at least once in a while.

MAHARISHI MAHESH YOGI—you may recall that he was once guru to The Beatles—has announced that his Global Country of World Peace will issue Peace Bonds paying 6 to 7 percent. The bonds will finance 3,000 Peace Palaces where his followers will practice yogic flying in which, writes Peter Carlson of *The Washington Post*, "meditators sort of hop around the room while sitting cross-legged."

Maharishi is confident that yogic flying at 3,000 locations will produce world peace. But how is he going to pay you that 6 or 7 percent? Not to worry. "Each Peace Palace," writes Carlson, "will be surrounded by an organic farm that will produce food that will generate the profits that will pay the bondholders."

This may sound like a put-on, but I can assure you Carlson is a sober fellow, having personally seen him survive a three-Negroni lunch and still get up and walk out of the restaurant. (Come to think of it, maybe he was a little cross-legged.)

TWENTY-TWO PERCENT OF graduates from the University of the District of Columbia's law school passed the bar exam last year. This compares with a national average of 73 percent. Yet UDC spends $11,043 per student compared to the national average of $5,687. "Every dollar spent on the law school is a dollar that could be spent on elementary education," D.C. Council member Sharon Ambrose tells Jim Keary of *The Washington Times*. She has a point.

RICHARD PERLE'S THREAT—"The failure to take on Saddam after what the president said would produce such a collapse of confidence in the president that it would set back the war on terrorism"—reminds me of how the CIA's Allen Dulles and Richard Bissell conned John Kennedy into finally okaying the Bay of Pigs, when he had seemed to be coming to his senses and threatened to cancel that misbegotten enterprise. They told Kennedy that if he backed out, the CIA's Cuban brigade would have to be disbanded, and its members would disperse throughout the Americas spreading the word that JFK was a sissy and that the "pay any price, bear any burden" in his inaugural address was just so much phony rhetoric. Kennedy caved. The lesson for Bush is that he should not. But instead of learning the lesson, he is becoming a Perle himself, advising congressional Democrats, "I can't imagine an elected member of the United States Senate or House of Representatives saying, 'I think I'm going to wait for the United Nations to make a decision.'"

THE BUSH PLAN TO GO TO WAR against Iraq reminds me of the British-French-Israeli attack on Egypt in 1956. Egypt was not attacking them, just as Iraq is not attacking us. Or anyone else.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

What Egypt had done was to seize the Suez Canal. But since the canal had long been controlled by an Anglo-French company, they were used to calling the shots and were outraged that an uppity wog like Egypt's Gamal Nasser would dare to offend them.

The consequences of the invasion were truly disastrous. It was immediately condemned by the United Nations. Much worse, the invasion came just as the Soviet Union was pondering whether it could get away with sending tanks into Hungary to suppress the 1956 Hungarian uprising. World opinion was clearly on Hungary's side. But the invasion of Egypt by three of America's closest allies deprived the West of the moral high ground, and the Russians figured they could get away with a little invading of their own.

One has to wonder what will be the unanticipated consequences of our invasion of Iraq. Certainly it is distracting us from the main chance. Just as the British, French, and Israelis should have been more concerned with what was going on in Hungary, we should be more concerned with what is happening between the Israelis and the Palestinians. A just solution there would do more to win the war on terrorism than anything else we could do.

PETER CARLSON HAS ANOTHER item about yogis that I just can't resist repeating. It concerns Bikram Choudhury of Beverly Hills, the self-styled "Guru of the Stars" whose pupils have included Michael Jackson and Madonna. When he is accused of having sex with his students, he asks: "What happens when they say they will commit suicide unless you sleep with them? What am I supposed to do? Sometimes having an affair is the only way to save someone's life."

SUPPOSE THERE IS A BIOLOGICAL attack on the United States—how are we going to find out it's underway? We can wait until the streets are littered with corpses, but to find out before that we must depend on the detection of early symptoms by individual physicians and hospitals. One hole in this safety net was recently explored by *Science* magazine: the very large number of people who tend not to consult doctors when they first show signs of illness because they are uninsured, underinsured, or illegal immigrants. How many people does this add up to? There are no reliable statistics. But I would guess it's at least 100 million.

It appears that people like to use "capitalism" when they're attacking the system and "markets" when they're advocating or defending it.

SOMETHING ELSE TO WORRY about: the water supply. "Throughout the country long-neglected mains and pipes, many more than a century old, are reaching the end of their lifespan," report *U.S. News & World Report*'s Marianne Lavelle and Joshua Kurlantzick. "When pipes fail, pressure drops and sucks dirt, debris, and often bacteria and other pathogens into the huge underground arteries that deliver water." I had written about this problem before and was wondering whether I should bother repeating it. But when I went to my faucet to get a drink of water, nothing came out. Then I heard noises from the street. I went outside and saw a bunch of workers gathered around a large hole. They told me that the water main had "split." I looked down into the hole and what I saw reeked of the early 19th century, or perhaps earlier. I wouldn't have been surprised to see some arrowheads.

HERE IS A FACT ALL OF US SORT of subconsciously know, but the actual statistics are still impressive evidence of the computer revolution. In 1991, the federal government employed 103,000 secretaries. Today, the figure is 47,000. I wonder how many of those remaining reflect their boss's technological ineptitude (as was the case with me) and how many represent a sacrifice at the altar of his ego.

THE PURPOSE OF THAT 1940 book I'm working on is to explain the significance of the nomination of Wendell Willkie as the Republican candidate for president. His opponents for the nomination were all isolationists. They opposed all-out aid to Britain, even though it was fighting for its life, and they opposed the military draft that was needed to give us a remotely adequate Army. If Willkie hadn't won, Roosevelt would have faced an isolationist opponent in an election year. He wouldn't have been able to get away with doing the right thing. There's a good chance Britain would have gone under and that we would have faced Hitler and Japan without a major ally and with an army of merely 200,000. That's the momentous part of the story. The fun part is that it was the most exciting convention of my lifetime.

Any of you who have any recollections of the time, or letters, books, and other documents that you think might help me, please write.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Monumental Failure

Why we should commercialize the National Mall.

BY JOSHUA GREEN

ONE DAY LATE IN AUGUST, WITH Congress out of session and the magazine enjoying a late-summer lull, I decided it was a good time to uphold the *Monthly* tradition of fleeing work while the boss was otherwise occupied for a rare bit of relaxation. One of the nicer features of our office is (or ought to be) its proximity to the National Mall, which, it suddenly occurred to me, I had never fully explored during my two years in Washington. Spurred by the exotic freedom of being outdoors on a workday, I resolved to take full advantage of this historic treasure and stroll its entire length, from the Lincoln Memorial to the Capitol.

This particular day was like most summer days in Washington—hot. As I approached the Lincoln Memorial, I spotted a water fountain shimmering in the distance beyond a cluster of parched and deserted baseball diamonds, but arrived to discover it was broken. So was the next one I encountered. And the next. Finding refuge in the shade of the Great Emancipator, I decided that the fun quotient for my afternoon escape was sorely lacking, and sought professional assistance. The Mall was conspicuously free of National Park Service employees, but eventually I found some huddled in the icy splendor of their air-conditioned kiosk. Grudgingly, one leaned forward and cracked a window, looking none too pleased at the perspiring interloper in his midst. I politely inquired about refreshments. Immediately he looked scandalized. "We don't sell beer on the National Mall ... It's federal property!"

As luck would have it, a passerby overheard this exchange and beckoned me over. It turned out that he manned one of the booths that sell Vietnam War memorabilia at the base of the Lincoln Memorial and that we shared similar tastes. Pointing to a refreshment stand not 50 feet from the rangers' kiosk, he assured me that I could indeed buy a beer. He was correct. But as a Park Service police officer gruffly announced after stopping me as I tried to proceed up the Mall, enjoying the beer was another matter: It is against the law to leave the tiny plot of dirt on which the refreshment stand sits—not for a shady bench or even for the restrooms a few dozen yards away in the Lincoln Memorial. He regarded me suspiciously as I drained my cup and slunk off.

My encounter is typical of today's National Mall. Instead of a public sanctuary for Americans to celebrate and enjoy, visitors are treated like ill-mannered museum-goers, endured but unwelcome. Approaching the Korean War Memorial, for example, signs forbid smoking, eating, drinking, biking, running, and—seriously—cross-country skiing. (Actual sign: "Honor those who served: KEEP OUT.") For many

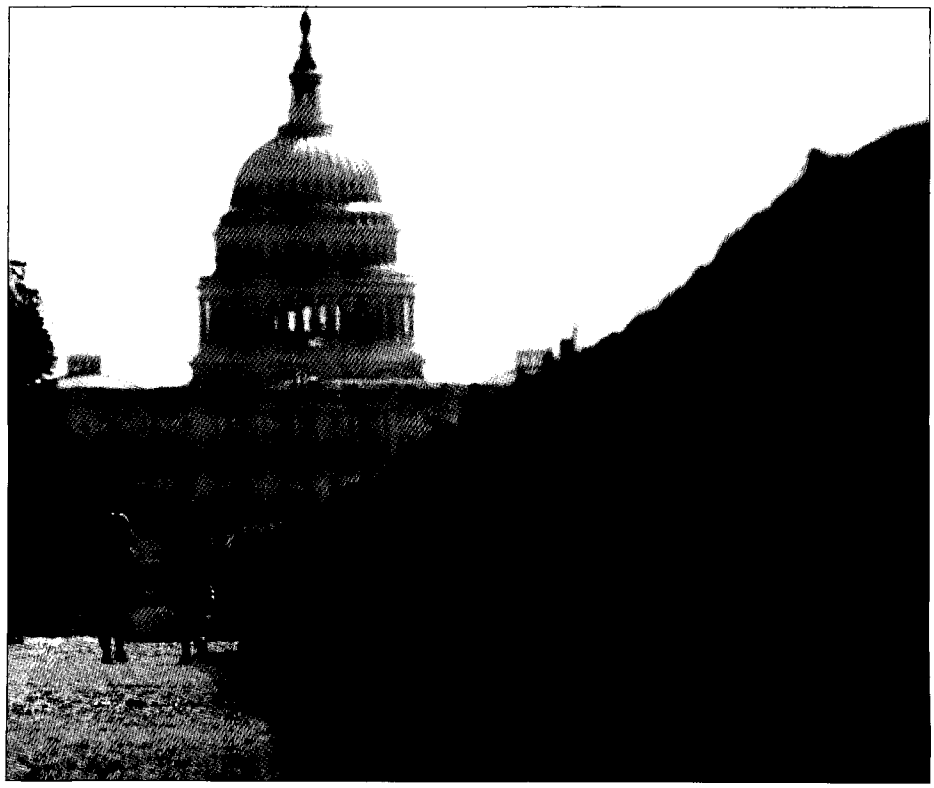
JOSHUA GREEN *is an editor of* The Washington Monthly.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of its 16 million annual visitors, the Mall is a profound disappointment. Much of it is fenced off to visitors. There are no picnic tables, few restrooms, and little in the way of shade or fountains. Its museums take pride in drawing great art from around the world, but its cuisine is drawn primarily from Coney Island. Those whose culinary interest transcends hot dogs and limp pizza slices must either intuit the existence of a food court hidden deep within the bowels of the Air and Space Museum or wander into downtown Washington to jostle with lobbyists for the privilege of paying $28 for a salmon lunch.

Trekking on toward the Capitol, I noticed that no one else was enjoying themselves either. Overheated parents pushed catatonic youngsters in strollers. Seniors staggered through the heat and dust. With no relief from the beating sun, tourists fanned themselves with brochures and wrapped T-shirts around their heads. Like me, most were sunburned, thirsty, and exhausted, possibly experiencing the late stages of heat stroke. Instead of the nourishing patriotic uplift that the Mall should provide, their weary stares betrayed a sober realization that they had encountered not the joyous public sanctuary they imagined, but a civic burden—in a metaphor for the way Washington works, one that cruelly ignores the needs of the very Americans whose taxes enable it.

This isn't the way it was supposed to be. Pierre Charles L'Enfant, whom George Washington commissioned to design the capital in 1791, envisioned the Mall as a "place of general resort" that would be "attractive to the learned and afford diversion to the idle." L'Enfant had in mind the great places of France: the parks and avenues of Paris, the stately precincts of Versailles. According to the architectural historian Pamela Scott, "The Mall was to be the center of the intellectual and artistic life of Washington."



Instead, it is a parched and barren expanse presided over by a despotic Park Service bent on stamping out any trace of fun or enjoyment. By day, oppressive heat and choking dust clouds frustrate its users—not Washingtonians but beleaguered tourists. By night it is bereft of human activity and controlled by marauding gangs of rats. For more than 200 years, Congress has been charged with stewardship of the Mall. The results are plain.

Were Washington indeed like a great European capital, this heart of the city would be a place where families, professionals, and tourists could gather at all hours in lively cafes arrayed along the Reflecting Pool to enjoy a cold drink and a good meal, laugh and socialize, or simply gaze in wonder at the marble symbols of America's greatness. Instead, on a hot summer day or a cool spring evening, there is no worse place to be in the nation's capital than the National Mall.

Monuments and Malaria

Throughout American history, the world's greatest architects have sought to realize the Mall's potential—and each has been thwarted. Pierre L'Enfant

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was never able to see his grand plan through to completion. In what would become a familiar pattern, he grew fed up with the federal commissioners overseeing the city's creation and resigned just months into the process. For the next half-century the Mall's development proceeded apace, overseen by Congress with not entirely unexpected results. L'Enfant's plan was largely ignored. During Andrew Jackson's presidency, many of the Mall's trees died due to the poor soil. The Washington Monument, which was to be erected at the axial convergence of the White House and the Capitol, was accidentally built off center. What today is known as the Ellipse—the green space between the White House and the Washington Monument—became "a fetid swamp created by sewage from the executive mansion." Waste from the Patent and Post Offices emptied into a malarial canal that lawmakers permitted to run directly down the middle of the Mall. Not surprisingly, the Mall was hardly the civic gathering place L'Enfant had imagined (though it was center to the city's booming slave trade).

The experience of visiting the National Mall is a lot like junior high civics class—there's lots of history and statesmanship in the air, but it's more pedantic than enjoyable, and going to the bathroom is all but out of the question.

In 1850, Congress again set itself to the task of beautification. The Smithsonian Building Committee envisioned "an extended park," which "by its picturesque style of architecture will form a prominent and most attractive feature." No less than President Fillmore himself formally invited the leading landscape architect of the day, Andrew Jackson Downing, to design the plan. Downing aimed for public comfort, submitting a plan that featured 130 new species of trees, a fountain garden, and a triumphant marble arch. In a fit of patriotism, he declared to his patrons, "If you gentlemen who have influence in Washington will stand by me I will make the Capital blossom like a rose." Congress responded by appropriating only enough funds to landscape a fraction of the Mall and permitted the B&O Railroad to cut across it at the foot of the Capitol. Downing died shortly thereafter, his dream unrealized. By the end of the century, the Mall—that part of it not overrun by steam engines—was divided into nearly a dozen zones, each controlled by a different government bureau, each with its own architect and gardening staff, and each accountable to a different congressional committee.

For 50 years, Downing's remained the guiding vision for the Mall. And for 50 years, Congress found reason to deny it funding. Not until the turn of the 20th century did lawmakers try once more. When they did, they had in mind nothing so noble as improving the lives of Americans, but instead wished to stop criticism from foreigners and luminaries like Henry James who considered the capital to be "ugly." In a renewed bid for cultural parity with the great European capitals, Senator James McMillan appointed three prominent landscape architects—Daniel Burnham, Charles McKim, and Frederick Law Olmsted Jr.—to what became known as the Senate Park Commission. By way of encouragement, Congress allotted them so little money that they were forced to "volunteer" as public servants, and paid for the architectural model of an improved Mall out of their own pockets.

When they presented their plan in 1902, Congress demonstrated its appreciation by terminating all appropriation and disbanding the commission. Its offense had not been aesthetic, but political: Speaker Joseph Cannon of Illinois cited the Senate's "politically egregious error" of failing to secure House approval to improve the Mall. Instead of acting on what became known as the McMillan Plan—which envisioned such public amenities as playgrounds, baths, theaters, gymnasiums, and athletic facilities—Congress built itself new House and Senate office buildings and a new headquarters for the Department of Agriculture.

It took nearly three decades and a world war for Congress to act again. When it was ready, it did so in characteristic fashion, establishing a commission to enact the McMillan Plan and allotting it so little money that it could only afford to hire a 27-year-old director. Though it managed to erect the Lincoln

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Memorial (after a lengthy skirmish), the commission also eliminated the "intrusive trees" along the Mall and eschewed new fountains because a prominent adviser despised them. Through the mid-1960s, lawmakers ignored numerous plans designed to restore the spirit of L'Enfant's "grand and majestic avenue." In 1965, the architectural firm of Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill tried once more, introducing a widely hailed plan that would have added public pavilions, kiosks, bandstands, fountains, and refreshment and recreational facilities that would at long last cater to the taxpaying public. It was roundly ignored. It is little surprise, then, that modern historians have concluded that the sorry state of our National Mall is a "pragmatic response to low budgets" and "a clear reflection of congressional indecision."

Scenes from a Mall

For as long as Congress has refused to fund the Mall, lawmakers have used it to flaunt their power and construct grandiose shrines to their egos. In the 1960s, House Speaker Sam Rayburn of Texas initiated construction of the ghastly $135-million Rayburn House Office Building, which one architecture critic memorably dubbed "the Texas Penitentiary" for its imposing blocks of concrete and flights of stairs that lead nowhere. (The architect who assisted with the project was reportedly so ashamed of the result that it haunted him till his death.) Rayburn and his successor, House Speaker John McCormick, also pushed through an unwanted extension to the east front of the Capitol, known as the "Texas Front," since both lawmakers viewed its construction as evidence of their power. In 1904, when Theodore Roosevelt refused to let the Agriculture Department extend its headquarters onto the Mall, its secretary, James Wilson, instructed architects to build only the wings, which one critic likened to a "decayed tooth." Congress's aesthetic philistinism shows no sign of abating. As recently as the 1960s, lawmakers proposed building an eight-lane highway to cut across the Mall where the railroad once did at the foot of the Capitol.

Often it was easier to exhibit one's power and bad taste by preventing improvements to the Mall. Speaker Cannon held up construction of the Lincoln Memorial for a decade because he didn't approve of the chosen location. It took the full weight of President Taft to get construction underway. Memorial Bridge, proposed in 1902 to connect the Lincoln Memorial with Arlington National Cemetery, was only built in 1923 after a traffic jam delayed the president's arrival at the dedication of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier for more than an hour. In 1952, Michigan's Rep. George Dondero, chairman of the House Committee on Public Buildings, delivered a memorable speech declaring that modernism was a "Communist conspiracy" that threatened to deprave American museums, and held up approval of modernist works like the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden that line the Mall today.

But there is perhaps no greater anathema to civic improvement than the Commission on Fine Arts—a sinister cabal of local elites who conspire to thwart public enjoyment of the Mall. Granted oversight by Congress in 1910, the commission controls everything from monument placement to signage, though its primary purpose seems to be crushing attempts at betterment of the Mall by haughtily denying modern-day proposals for fountains, cafes, and bandstands, while allowing such blights as the World War II Memorial to speed ahead. Because it is at the mercy of Congress—which itself cringes before well-organized interest groups like World War II vets—the Fine Arts Commission invites the worst of both worlds: It blocks public-spirited improvements yet is powerless to stop congressional eyesores.

Indeed, there are currently no fewer than 13 memorials that have been approved by Congress and await only a location. These include monuments to such former presidents as Dwight Eisenhower and John Adams, but also to the likes of Tomas Masaryk (the first president of Czechoslovakia) and Benjamin Banneker (the black mathematician who measured the moons of Jupiter). Many more are pending in Congress. When it comes to the Mall, admits Charles Atherton, executive secretary of the Fine Arts Commission, "Congress can do anything it damn well pleases." This tradition encompasses more than just caving to the fearsome Czech-American lobby (to say nothing of Jupiter's political clout). For those lawmakers who feel compelled to compensate for a perceived shortcoming, ramming through some architectural atrocity predates even sports cars and powerboats as a desperate symbol of virility. It is time once and for all to free this national treasure from the pestilence of congressional influence.

I Have a Dream ...

These days, the experience of visiting the National Mall is a lot like a junior high school civics

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

class—there's lots of history and statesmanship in the air, but it's more pedantic than enjoyable, and going to the bathroom is all but out of the question. This is partly because bluenose historic preservationists wish to preserve the Mall in amber, partly because Congress's interest in it is limited to appeasing whichever ominous-looking interest group happens to be demanding public tribute. Today's Mall is completely isolated from the life of the city, a far cry from the intended civic gathering place. Save for the odd march or protest, it is ignored (so much so that it's a popular place to dispose of corpses, which surface every now and then in the Tidal Basin).

The Mall today is not a symbol of America so much as of the average American congressman—stately, aloof, and not much fun after 6 p.m.

Most of the people I encountered in late August were tourists, many of them foreigners, or unlucky folks who, like me, were forced either through ignorance, filial obligation, or a misplaced sense of patriotism to attempt the Bataan Death March from Lincoln Memorial to the Capitol. Apart from the occasional lobster-hued jogger panting along through the blazing sun, no one appeared to live in the District.

Rather than mirror the great capitals of Europe as L'Enfant wished, the Mall mirrors the culture of Washington workaholism, promoting the belief that nothing of interest occurs after dusk and reinforcing the "state capital" quality from which the city suffers. As Richard Guy Wilson, chairman of the architectural history department at the University of Virginia, points out, "Politicians view the Mall as no more than a backdrop for national pageantry." In other words, they don't actually *use* it. Consequently, the Mall is not a symbol of America so much as of the average American congressman—stately, aloof, and not much fun after 6 p.m.

Were such a space in Rome, Paris, or London, it would undoubtedly be a vibrant haven, teeming with life and full of fountains, plazas, bars, and restaurants that pick up—not empty out—when the sun sets. It's time to end the stifling curatorial tyranny plaguing our nation's capital and democratize the National Mall—to finally realize L'Enfant's vision of a bustling, "grand avenue." Anyone daunted by the prudes and preservationists who insist this would be ruinous need look no further than L'Enfant's beloved Paris to see how easily national monuments can sit among congenial public amenities. The possibilities are practically limitless: morning espresso in the half light of spring cherry blossoms, lunch under the gaze of the Lincoln Monument, margaritas and nachos along the Reflecting Pool, a beer garden in Constitution Gardens—and why not a moon bounce for the kids? The time has come to liberate the Mall from its elitist death grip. Anything less is simply un-American. ●

Research assistance provided by Brent Kendall.

GREAT JOB, LOW PAY

The Washington Monthly **is seeking applicants for an editor/reporter position that will be available soon. A sense of humor and the willingness to work long hours for low pay are required. Candidates should send a cover letter, résumé, and writing samples (not necessarily published, but showing fact-gathering and analytic ability) to:**

Editors
The Washington Monthly
733 15th Street NW, Suite 1000
Washington, D.C. 20005

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Parent Gap

What Arnold Schwarzenegger can teach politicians about winning swing voters.

BY KAREN KORNBLUH

ON A BRIGHT CALIFORNIA DAY LAST April, Arnold Schwarzenegger was out of character. Instead of shooting up bad guys on a movie set, he was driving to the Los Angeles county clerk's office in a truck loaded with petitions bearing 750,000 signatures in support of a ballot initiative to fund California after-school programs, known as the After School Education and Safety Act. The proposal, spearheaded by Schwarzenegger, would offer a matching grant to every public elementary, middle, and junior high school for after-hours programs that would keep kids safely occupied for those treacherous afternoons when their parents are still at work.

It's the kind of feel-good social program that you might expect to find an old-fashioned Democrat peddling. Except that in this case, it's Schwarzenegger—who, though married into the Kennedy clan, is an active Republican seriously considering a run for governor of California. The erstwhile Terminator now spends his days sounding more like Marian Wright Edelman. "Half of all California kids are now in single working-parent homes or homes with two working parents," he told me. "One million kids under the age of 15 are home alone after school. These are kids that do not have anyone to do homework with them, take them to the sports field, or hug them."

On the campaign trail, he's adopted a similar mantra. "Studies show that after-school programs reduce crime, reduce alcohol and drug use, reduce grade repetition, and increase scores on standardized tests," he likes to say. When asked about whether his initiative would put the government in the position of replacing mom, he responds, "Do we want philosophy or action? I want action."

How did Schwarzenegger turn into an activist for after-school programs? George Gorton, campaign manager for the ballot initiative and one-time chief political adviser to former Gov. Pete Wilson, says Schwarzenegger came to the issue through serving as chairman of President George H.W. Bush's Council on Physical Fitness and founding the Inner City Games after-school program. But he is clearly contemplating a future run for office and needed to define himself with a signature issue that would strike a chord with the voters. So he tapped into the vast and unmet need for the government to do something to ease the stress of working parents whose schedules do not easily accommodate a school day designed for an agricultural society. Not only would the after-school plan give parents the security of having somewhere safe and stimulating to leave their kids after school, the public initiative would also ease the financial strain on parents who otherwise would have to pay for private child care—care that may not be as good or reliable as what the public schools could provide.

Sixty percent of Californians support Schwarzenegger's proposal, which is backed by 100 mayors and a broad array of groups from the right and the left, including the California Teachers Association, the California State Sheriffs' Association, and the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association. The real mystery, then, isn't why Arnold is on the case. It's why more politicians aren't. Issues like after-school care, paid parental leave, and more flexible workplaces aren't a factor in this year's midterm congressional elections. Instead, the fight for Congress hinges on issues like prescription drugs and

KAREN KORNBLUH *is a fellow at the New America Foundation.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Social Security. Most candidates this year from both parties are largely ignoring a critical and increasingly potent issue.

Meet the Parents

California isn't the only state in which struggling parents are juggling the dual jobs of caring for children and earning a living. In 70 percent of American families with children under 18, all parents work. As a result, parents have 22 fewer hours per week to spend with their children than they did in 1969. Yet the workplace, the school day, and the social safety net have been slow to accommodate this radical shift. Instead, the burden has been on parents to adapt, which they've done by individually cobbling together private, makeshift—and often expensive—child-care arrangements that leave much to be desired. Every workday, millions of children are left in unlicensed day care. Twenty percent of children ages six to 12 with a working mother have no adult supervision at all in the hours after school. Women have borne the brunt of these changes, forced to sacrifice financial security—taking dead-end, part-time jobs with no benefits, for instance—to be home when their kids get out of school.

Not since Bill Clinton has a politician seeking national office suggested that government take a wider role in supporting working parents.

You'd think that this would be a potent political issue. After all, soccer moms—those electoral darlings whom both political parties have recently courted—are particularly attuned to such problems. Yet America's elected officials are all but ignoring the pressures that face American families on a daily basis. Democratic political consultant Tom Freedman says this is a sleeper issue that "both parties ignore at their peril."

It's not hard to see why. In 1992, Bill Clinton won the White House in part by whacking George H.W. Bush for his failure to support the Family and Medical Leave Act, helping Clinton become the first Democratic contender in at least a decade to win the votes of a majority of married women. On the advice of his pollster, Mark Penn, Clinton also targeted soccer moms in his successful 1996 campaign against Bob Dole. Ever since, operatives in both parties have urged a renewed focus on this group as a key to winning elections. That's because married women make up about one-third of the electorate and—unlike unmarried women, who are solidly Democratic—are within reach of either party, a classic "swing" voting group. Recently, Penn has been urging Democrats to expand their field of vision to include soccer moms' husbands—"office-park dads," the moderate-income suburban fathers who make up 15 percent of the electorate. All in all, parents with kids at home make up one-third of voters—a slightly larger group than the seniors whom both parties are targeting so heavily this fall. Working parents in families in which no parent is at home full time constitute well over one-third of the total population.

You can gauge their worry by the glut of magazines and bestselling books that address the problems of working families. Articles with titles like "The Choice: Kids vs. Career: One Woman's Story," "Goodbye, Boss Lady, Hello, Soccer Mom," and "Superdad; Moms Aren't Alone in Struggles to Balance Careers and Families" appear regularly in the national media. And a new crop of books has inspired even more public discussion. Ann Crittenden's widely read book of last year, *The Price of Motherhood*, proclaimed that an upper-income mother who leaves her career to care for her child can sacrifice $1 million over a lifetime. Sylvia Ann Hewlett grabbed headlines by purporting to show that a woman's career success can come at the expense of having children. Nancy Folbre won a MacArthur "genius" grant for illuminating the ways in which an economic system that makes it difficult for parents to support children may deprive itself of future generations of labor.

These authors and others question why the United States remains one of only two industrialized nations that don't require paid maternity leave. (Before the Taliban took control, even the government of Afghanistan did so.) They emphasize that many mothers would like to work part-time or cycle in and out of work while raising kids, so as to maintain a foothold on the economic ladder without neglecting their children's well-being, but that such opportunities are few and far between. They bemoan the scarcity of affordable, quality child care, school hours tied to an agrarian economy, and the way mothers who cut back their hours or drop out of the workforce forfeit credit

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

toward Social Security.

These books touched a nerve—especially with 30- and 40-something upper-income women left wondering how they went so quickly from "career gal" to unemployed room parent. But these problems aren't limited to upper-income women. The stresses on lower-income mothers and fathers are even more severe. Jody Heymann, chair of the Harvard University Work, Family and Democracy Initiative, found in a nationwide study that 30 percent of working parents must take time off every week to care for a family member and many risk losing their job by doing so. "American families are under enormous stress," says Heymann. "More than they need to be, and more than their counterparts in other countries."

This is why some political pollsters and strategists have been telling politicians that Americans support measures that would ease the pressure of managing work and family. Penn says, "Paid leave gets [poll] numbers like 80 [percent] because men like it, too. It's money in the bank." An OfficeTeam survey taken in May, which asked workers to rank their number-one career concern, found the ability to balance business and personal demands topped the list, with nearly one-third of respondents ranking this higher even than job security and salary.

Yet not since Clinton has a politician seeking national office suggested that government take a wider role in supporting working parents. Ask the two parties what their candidates are doing to help relieve the American family's time crunch, and here's what you get:

Tovah Ravitz, press secretary for the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, insists that Democrats are focusing on work/family issues, saying, "I think that a lot of our campaigns are talking about work/family issues. That definition as to what things are in the category of work/family vary depending on the person. When people talk about everything from Social Security to prescription drugs, it's all about personal security ... they are all part of people's security about their work, family, home ... It is one of the biggest issues that Democrats will be talking about during these elections."

Dan Allen, spokesman for the National Republican Senatorial Committee, says it's simply not true that the GOP is doing nothing to help ease work/family time strains. "From the Republican standpoint, we are very focused on middle-class family issues. The fact is, a lot of these issues intertwine. For instance, prescription drugs are very important to middle-class families—many people have parents who are about to retire. The burden of prescription drugs has become a crisis for a lot of families."

Prescription drugs and Social Security are no doubt important issues for the nation's seniors. But if you relied solely on the words of candidates running for office in this year's midterm congressional elections, you'd never guess that work/family issues were top priorities for a great many other Americans.

Brawl in the Family

Part of the explanation lies in the bruising 10-year battle to pass the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) that began in the 1980s. On one side were a group of savvy liberals including Howard Berman (D-Calif.) and Pat Schroeder (D-Colo.) in the House and Chris Dodd (D-Conn.) in the Senate, who worked with the Women's Legal Defense Fund (now the National Partnership on Women and Families) and other advocates to build a broad legislative coalition. After seven years of negotiations, that coalition included the Junior League, the Catholic Conference, unions, civil rights groups, and feminists alike. By the time debate began in Congress, they had also garnered the support of influential conservatives like Henry Hyde (R-Ill.)—who said on the House floor, "I don't think my support for family leave is aberrational, but rather it's consistent with traditional values"—as well as Chris Bond (R-Mo.) and Dan Coats (R-Ind.).

But business lobbies staunchly opposed the bill, a modest piece of legislation which mandated that employers give workers three months of unpaid leave after the birth or adoption of a child or to care for a sick family member. As Ed Frank of the National Federation of Independent Businesses says, "Our guys don't want the federal government telling us what to do." They were joined by a host of anti-regulation libertarians and some social conservatives who, unlike Hyde and Coats, feared the measure would encourage more mothers to join the workforce.

The Democratic Congress passed FMLA twice, and twice President George H.W. Bush vetoed it (adding to voters' general feeling that Bush didn't "get it" on domestic issues). But on the campaign trail, Clinton and Gore found that calling for FMLA was their best applause line. And when Clinton took office in 1993, he made it the first bill he signed.

Yet that was essentially the beginning and the end of serious political debate about real support for working families. Clinton did push through several low visibility but important measures that didn't require major battles in Congress, including funding for after-school programs and allowing the states to use unemployment insurance to provide paid parental leave. However, the failure of healthcare reform later in Clinton's term made

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Democrats wary of pursuing any large-scale government reforms.

Meanwhile, small-business activists extended their presence in the Democratic Party. In 2000, for instance, small-business owners on the Democratic platform committee fought against a proposal to provide paid family leave. Even now, the business lobby is still waging legislative and legal assaults on the immensely popular FMLA, which doesn't even cover businesses with fewer than 50 people. As a result, Judith Lichtman, president of the National Partnership for Women and Families, says advocates for social change have but a fraction of the resources available to their opponents.

Another problem may be that work/family issues aren't as attractive as narrower issues with more vocal constituencies. Grover Norquist, president of Citizens for Tax Reform and a leading Republican strategist, says politicians would rather focus on retirement programs because that's where they believe the votes are. Twenty-four percent of voters are seniors, he says, and with people living longer and having fewer children, fewer of the voting age citizenry are parents of young children. To a politician, playing to retirees looks like a much better bet.

Norquist ignores the fact that parents with kids at home make up one-third of voters. But he's right about parents being a tougher nut to crack. Unlike seniors, working parents don't necessarily look to the government for help. According to Anna Greenberg, a political scientist and vice president of Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, Inc., families "have trouble translating this issue into policies that might help. The structural causes are so broad, given the constraints of the policymaking apparatus."

Divides within each party also make it hard for politicians to reach another bipartisan consensus. Within the GOP, some social conservatives oppose anything that helps working mothers. ("Thanks, Mom: The Case Against Working Mothers," was the title of a *National Review* cover story last year that reflected this sentiment.) However, others would like to provide families more support in the belief that mothers would then stay home. These conservatives could be persuaded to support intermediate government actions—as Henry Hyde did with the FMLA—but they face opposition from the party's libertarians, who oppose practically all expansions of government's role.

On the other side of the aisle, Democrats are torn between those who recognize that a successful, broad social-policy agenda must address the needs of middle-class families, and those who feel that the federal government's limited budgetary resources and their limited political capital should focus first on the needs of the poor. The limited-scope side appears to be winning. Anne Kim, who works on the Work, Family & Communities Project at the Progressive Policy Institute, says that this year, the biggest work/family issues for Democrats fall under the heading of welfare reform, where Democrats are struggling to increase funds for low-income child-care subsidies so that one out of six eligible kids will receive subsidized care instead of one out of seven—hardly a bold agenda even for the poor.

Democrats, too, have been resistant to the kinds of compromises that might allow them to reach out to stay-at-home parents as well as those who work. For instance, when Hillary Clinton wanted to include a tax credit for stay-at-home mothers in a White House child-care package, others in the administration blocked the idea, helping to doom the package on the Hill.

The end result is a kind of policy sclerosis. Linda Chavez, the conservative activist and President George W. Bush's first nominee for Labor secretary, a working mother, says, "A Democrat would have a hard time suggesting women should delay going into workforce just as a Republican would have difficulty saying that women should be able to work."

A Prescription for Parents

While Washington partisans on the right and the left may still be fighting a culture war over the working mother, the rest of the country has moved on in the decade since enactment of the FMLA. More mothers are in the workplace than ever before; having a job is less a choice than a necessity—one that smart politicians would do well to recognize.

To make work/family issues a winner, politicians need only take a second look at Bill Clinton's success on this score. Clinton was able to win the presidency because he offered middle-class Americans the vision of a government that would respond to their everyday needs—through the FMLA, health care, job retraining, and the like. He was responding to critics who argued that the Democratic Party needed to offer programs that helped the middle class as well as the poor, that incorporated the private sector, and that were supportive of the values held by most families. He incorporated these critiques—and many of the critics—into his efforts, crafting a program and a message that allowed middle-class families to feel he was on their side.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Clinton's success at latching onto these issues suggests that a savvy party could tailor a popular national campaign around the right blend of work/family policies—policies that would benefit the poor and middle class alike. Such a platform might include the following:

• Provide universal after-school care and universal pre-school. The school day should match the workday to ease parents' child-care burden and to help prepare the future workforce through high-quality educational programs.

• End the "parent penalties" in the tax code. Harvard's David Ellwood and Jeffrey Liebman have proposed a single, integrated child tax credit to replace the existing combination of the Earned Income Tax Credit, child tax credit, and dependent exemption in order to target more support to middle-income families.

• Provide secondary earners an exemption on the payroll tax. And expand the child-care credit so that it covers a greater portion of the cost of child care. Make it refundable and make stay-at-home parents eligible.

• Require paid leave. Time off isn't enough. Parents should be able to actually afford to take leave for a new child or to care for a sick family member.

• Reward stay-at-home parents. Congress should make it easier for stay-at-home parents to get tax-subsidized health insurance and pensions and make them eligible for Social Security credits, disability insurance, workers' compensation, and the child-care tax credit to compensate for the income they lose by caring for a child.

These issues are nonpartisan, and either party could conceivably launch such programs. But the issue is a natural one for the Democrats because it plays to all the party's strengths. Holly Fechner, chief labor counsel on the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, says such an agenda would be possible with "a campaign that brings the big picture into focus." Ann Lewis, national chair of the Democratic National Committee's Women Vote Center, concurs that Democrats need to help American families recognize that government can play a productive role in easing some of the stress in their daily lives.

Diffident Democrats

Unfortunately, the Democrats seem stuck in a defensive crouch. They appear to have learned only the negative lessons from the fight over FMLA and, more significantly, the healthcare debacle that followed, which left them overcautious about any but the safest of social policy battles. As a result, they may find these issues co-opted by George W. Bush. Little noted in discussions of the Bush tax cut were the provisions that reduce taxes for lower, and middle-income families with children—the refundable child tax credit, the expanded child and dependent care tax credit, and marriage penalty relief. These provisions will be partially phased in before the 2004 election, unlike most of the far larger cuts for wealthy Americans.

According to Len Burman and Jeffrey Rohaly of the Urban Institute, a family of four at the median income will owe approximately $1,300 less in taxes in constant dollars once the Bush tax cut is fully phased in than it did in 2000. The tax break does nothing to change the structure of work—and these families will be the ones stuck with the bill or the lack of Social Security benefits—but it's better than nothing. And so far, it's better than anything the Democrats have come up with.

And Republicans have certainly nailed down the rhetoric. Ann Wagner, co-chair of the RNC, tells her audiences that she knows firsthand how it feels to try to balance work and family. It's like "juggling an egg, a soccer ball, and a chain saw. And then the cell phone rings." When asked what President Bush is doing for working parents, Wagner proudly cites Bush's tax cut that, she says, gave middle-income families "$1,500 for a vacation or to hire a tutor." No surprise, then, that working parents now support the GOP by six points.

But the stakes are about to rise for both sides. In California, the legislature recently passed a bill to require paid parental leave—the first in the nation. At press time, Democratic governor Gray Davis hadn't yet decided whether he would sign the bill, but given Schwarzenegger's success with his after-school measure, Davis risks ceding work/family issues to the Republicans if he doesn't. Sen. Ted Kennedy (D-Mass.)—the Terminator's uncle—thinks the issue is heading for the national stage. According to Fechner, he believes work/family issues are "the next big Democratic issue," and is developing a legislative agenda. It remains to be seen whether the issue will be joined at the political level. A key indicator, though, may come from the nation's leading futurist, Al Gore, who, with wife Tipper, is writing two books on the American family, due out in November—just around the time he is likely to announce his candidacy for 2004. ●

Research assistance provided by Brent Kendall, Amia Srinivasan, and John Mangin.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Bad Press

How business journalism helped inflate the bubble.

BY PHILLIP J. LONGMAN

PICK UP *The Wall Street Journal* today, and the business pages are full of stories about the men and women who built the stock market bubble. Months into the current downturn, the saga of Enron, WorldCom, Arthur Andersen, and other 1990s cheats has become the biggest running business story in decades—and business journalists are hot on the trail. Should we blame sticky-fingered CEOs? Self-dealing analysts and accountants? Board members asleep at the switch? Absolutely. But there's another sector of the economy, deeply implicated in the collapse, whose conflicts of interest, ethical lapses, and naïve enthusiasms have so far received little press attention: business journalism itself.

I was once proud of my profession and resentful of those who criticized it. For more than 20 years, I rode the great boom in business journalism that began in the early 1980s. I like to believe that at least some of my stories helped to enlighten readers and remedy wrongdoing. But today, I'm more likely to admit—at least on a bad day—that I spent my youth hustling Tyco shares to senior citizens. Just as Americans put far too much faith in the integrity and intellectual prowess of stock analysts and other supposedly disinterested financial watchdogs during the boom, they also put far too much stock in business journalism, and have a right to be disappointed and angry.

PHILLIP J. LONGMAN *is a senior fellow at the New America Foundation in Washington, D.C.*

Like many of the industries we once covered, business journalists built their own bubble during the last decade. And now—as is appropriate for an industry that grew rich by dishing out so much bad advice and flabby reporting—business journalism is currently suffering the same financial fate as Wall Street and Silicon Valley. *The Industry Standard*—where reporters once took time off from chronicling the achievements of dot-com heroes to enjoy in-house massages and open-bar parties graced by belly dancers—is history, along with many other formerly high-riding business rags. And even the most venerable and established business publications are in trouble. *The Wall Street Journal* has suffered huge layoffs. *Forbes*, no longer profitable, is reducing staff and executive salaries, eliminating the 401(k) plan, and raising cash by auctioning off old man Forbes's various art collections. *Business Week*, which championed the "new economy" and in the late 1990s proclaimed an end to the business cycle, saw its advertising plunge from 6,000 pages in 2000 to 3,786 last year, and may finish 2002 with even fewer.

But it's not clear to me that the deeper lessons of what went wrong have been absorbed by either the public or business journalists themselves. Many of the biggest "rah-rah" boys in the business, like James Kramer and James Glassman (coauthor of the 1999 book *Dow 36,000)* continue to appear in print and on TV, while most surviving publications and newscasts have merely downsized and hoped for the best. The public is getting some brilliantly reported catch-up stories on the crooks we once celebrated or ignored, but there's little indication that the business press is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ready to examine its own sins and failings. In my experience, there are three essential fallacies that pervade business journalism in all its forms, and correcting them is every bit as important as any of the other business reforms the nation is now so hotly debating.

Fallacy #1: We are dispassionate observers, free from conflicts of interest.

In November 1997, I wrote an article for *U.S. News & World Report* that raised questions about a recently published and much-discussed cover story in *Wired* called "The Long Boom." The editor of *U.S. News* then was James Fallows, who shared my doubts about the growing chorus of voices proclaiming that America stood on the threshold of a new age of superabundance. But to get my piece into print, Fallows had to work until 2 a.m. as the presses stood by to accommodate furious objections from the magazine's owner, real estate tycoon Mort Zuckerman. The resulting piece, entitled "Is Prosperity Permanent?," lacked the word "bubble," though it still managed to raise a few subtle questions about the case for the long boom. Fallows was fired shortly afterward, and I have no doubt that the fireworks that flew that night were a contributing factor. Later, after I proposed similar stories to the new regime and was shot down, "bubble" became notorious around the office as a word Zuckerman would not permit in his magazine anywhere near the word "economy." Instead, often against their better judgments, and sometimes in silent fury, the magazine's business writers concentrated on articles like the April 3, 2000, cover story—one that, even after the NASDAQ had begun to crash, explained how "new tools" for evaluating a company's worth (such as ignoring its lack of profits) could justify a continuing bull market.

Why did so many business journalists wind up hyping the bubble? There are both innocent and not-so-innocent reasons. Many reporters, editors, and even a few media moguls were sincerely caught up in the same irrational exuberance that affected even Alan Greenspan in the end. Moreover, the boom did produce compelling yarns about flashy dot-com millionaires on the make and imminent technological wonders. And many business reporters simply didn't know what they didn't know about business. The old hands came up in an era when business journalism was a backwater where the best and brightest rarely ventured. And many journalists who poured into the field during the boom were lured more by inflated salaries than any deep curiosity about how business works. As media columnist Michael Wolff wrote at the peak of the boom in March 2000: "Not only is every self-respecting ambitious journalist becoming a business journalist, but the great sucking sound is the sound of people being pulled away from newsrooms everywhere by the persistence of business-press headhunters and the doubling and tripling of general-news salaries."

Even among us doubters, few wanted to be bearers of news no one wanted to hear. There was the danger of coming off as some unreconstructed Naderite relic of the 1970s—or worse, of being blamed for causing the very crash one wanted to warn was coming. And though some journalists, such as Robert Samuelson, were able to make early and persuasive arguments in print that America had entered a bubble economy, neither he nor anyone else could say when exactly the bubble would burst.

Less innocently, business publications, especially those celebrating the boom, were growing fat from dot-com ads. The new media couldn't get enough eyeballs to their sites, so they advertised lavishly in the old media. General-interest publications, such as *U.S. News*, started beefing up their business and technology sections (at the expense of foreign and political news) to lap up this money gusher, while scores of hot new print publications made fantastic profits selling dot-com ads placed against fawning editorial content. Zuckerman, in addition to owning *U.S. News*, then owned *Fast Company*—a hymnal for the new economy that was so swollen with dot-com and telecom ads that it became a problem to figure out how to bind it. In 2000, *The Industry Standard* faced a similar conundrum, having sold 7,558 advertising pages—an industry record. The point is that large parts of the media came to have a huge stake in promoting and flattering the boom's most flamboyant figures, as well as the products and ideas they were selling.

If that sounds like conflict of interest, it was. At any publication, there is, of course, a tension between the need to please advertisers and the need to please readers, just as there's a tension at financial firms between the need to please corporate clients in search of investors and investor clients seeking advice on where to put their money. How that tension gets resolved is the big issue, and more often than not, at business publications in the 1990s, it was resolved in a manner that favored advertisers—and worse, advertisers, who, it has turned out, were selling shoddy products.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fallacy #2: We can give readers useful advice about which stocks to pick.

Few business journalists spend much time analyzing balance sheets. But even if they did, they wouldn't be of much help to folks trying to figure out how to invest their 401(k)s. This truth was forced on me when I set out to learn high finance (after years of writing about it) at Columbia Business School. Here I was, a 40-something guy on a fellowship for mid-career business journalists, surrounded by 20-something whiz kids who would shortly go off with their newly minted MBAs to dazzle Wall Street. And what was the first lesson our finance professor drove home? That even after spending two years and $60,000 at Columbia Business School, none of them would be able to outperform the markets except by sheer luck or inside information.

The financial services industry won't buy ads in a publication that touts the message: "Embrace thrift, reduce debt, and spread your savings around."

This is orthodox academic theory, but it's also empirically true. After all, the mutual fund industry is consistently unable to outperform the stock market as a whole, despite all the money it spends on sophisticated research. The most compelling explanation for this collective failure is that however good or bad a company may be, its stock price reflects all known information about its prospects. Any breaking news about the company may drive its stock up or down, but it won't help investors find a bargain, because everyone else gets the same news at the same time. The big winners on Wall Street, our professor concluded, are either very lucky—or crooks.

I enjoyed the sight of my fellow students, many of them aspiring Masters of the Universe, squirming in their chairs. But before long I was sharing in their cognitive dissonance. I had come to Columbia to make myself a better financial reporter. What I was learning only reinforced my growing doubts about the intellectual legitimacy of the whole enterprise. If the smartest minds on Wall Street can't consistently beat the market, how does it help readers to pass along their stock tips?

Providing "News You Can Use" about which stocks to pick is worse than a disservice to readers. As I gradually came to see, it distracts ordinary Americans from the two big truths about investing they do need to know. First, that widely diversifying their investments is a far better strategy than chasing hot stocks. Second, that for most people, old-fashioned thrift, not shrewd investing, is the largest determinant of how much wealth they'll accumulate.

Ever hear that last one before? From the ads and articles in personal finance sections, one can easily get the impression that the most important financial decision investors face is picking the right stock or mutual-fund manager and earning the highest possible return on your investment. But that's an illusion, created by ads and advertising-driven story selection. Over time, most people won't beat the market averages, almost by definition. But while they have very little control over what rate of return they can make, most can control how much they save in the first place, and that makes a huge difference. A little arithmetic makes the point. Suppose, for example, you make $50,000 a year, save 10 percent of your income and receive a 10-percent return on your savings. In 30 years, your nest egg will accumulate to $803,402. But if you can boost your savings rate by just five percentage points, you'll wind up with $1,245,602, or almost 50 percent more.

Now imagine what personal finance sections would look like if they reflected these sober truths. The preponderance of articles about financing college or planning for retirement would offer "News You Can Use" about how to stretch a dollar and avoid credit-card debt, not breathless profiles of last quarter's luckiest mutual-fund manager. Articles would warn about putting all your eggs in one basket, and offer practical ways to manage a diverse portfolio, rather than hyping high-flying tech stocks and day-trader strategies. Yet publishers will tell you that they can't sell ads against that kind of copy. The financial services industry does not want to support a publication that touts the message: "Embrace thrift, reduce your debt, and spread your savings around because all successful money managers are either just lucky or crooks." So instead we publish the copy that advertisers want, and that readers believe at their peril.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fallacy #3: We're sleuths who work hard to ferret out business corruption.

As the bubble reached its fullest in 2000, *Fortune* celebrated Enron as one of the "100 Best Companies to Work for in America" because of the flexible career paths it offered to employees, approvingly citing the claim of the company's V.P. of human relations that, at Enron, "entrepreneurs can build something of their own with the luxury of a stable organization."

When Enron declared bankruptcy on Dec. 2, 2001, the largest corporate insolvency in U.S. history merited only brief mentions in the media that night and was not front-page news in most of the next morning's papers. To *Fortune*'s credit, and *U.S. News*'s as well, they had begun waving a few red flags about Enron shortly before its collapse. But only after the Bush administration's links to the company became known did the Enron story acquire "legs" (as reporters like to say). And we now know that in 1999, enterprising reporters who penetrated Enron's balance sheet had trouble getting much play for the story because it was a company most Americans had never heard of, its products were hard to describe, its sins were highly technical, its victims were diffuse, and its management was very aggressive with any critics.

This failure of business journalism is more the rule than the exception. Twelve years ago, when investigative reporters and editors gathered, the talk was about how we had all failed to see the S&L crisis coming. Since then, the obstacles to serious investigative reporting on American business have only grown more severe. Media conglomeration means that many of the biggest business stories involve media companies themselves. (How would you like a shot at covering AOL Time Warner's accounting irregularities from a desk at *Time*, *Fortune*, *Money*, *Business 2.0*, CNN, or any of its other vast media holdings?) The entrenchment of public-relations managers in business—abetted by schools of journalism that now offer degrees in flackery—means that press access to workers and hands-on executives becomes ever more limited and controlled. And layoffs in the newsroom and shrinking budgets leave few resources available for enterprise reporting.

Movin' On Up

But there are reasons for optimism. One of the benefits of hard times is that they create a market for serious analysis of economic conditions and corporate culture, and reduce tolerance for hype. The golden age of business journalism began during the Great Depression, when the first issue of *Fortune* magazine hit the stands in February of 1930. Though it might seem that founder Henry Luce's timing couldn't have been worse, he was actually quite savvy in realizing that the crash on Wall Street would only increase the market for a very smart and exhaustive journal of corporate culture, even if it cost a whopping $1 per issue. The times demanded that corporate managers understand the big picture, including the huge economic decisions being made in Washington and other foreign capitals. Luce satisfied that need by hiring bright young writers of the likes of Archibald MacLeish, John Kenneth Galbraith, and Alfred Kazin, who offered far more than an M.B.A.'s view of the world, with features running up to 8,000 words. From its beginning, *Fortune* earned consistent and respectable profits, and in 1937, the magazine netted close to half a million dollars with a circulation of 460,000, making it one of the crown jewels of Luce's media empire.

What will it take to fix business journalism? Not advertising-driven features on celebrity CEOs and flash-in-the-pan start-ups, or financial advice based on conflicted sources. As *Fortune* writers did in the '30s and '40s, today's business journalists will have to rebuild their credibility the old-fashioned way, by talking to sources at all levels, including customers, competitors, and loading-dock hands, and by paying far less attention to stock analysts and CFOs. If such investigations uncover malfeasance, then that's a story. But even if a company like Enron had been squeaky clean, a talented writer—given enough time and access—could have written a fascinating account of its corporate culture and business methods. *Fortune* once published detailed profiles of stodgy companies like the Southern Pacific Railroad just because they played a key role in the American economy and reflected many larger trends, not because they had a flashy CEO, a rising stock price, or some other kind of "news energy."

Even 60 years later, these stories are a joy to read, not only because they are so well written and reported, but because of the insights they give into larger changes in labor relations, production methods, consumption patterns, and much else that was occurring in America at the time. Only that kind of serious, sober, independent reporting can give the public the insights into American business it now knows it needs to learn. Let's hope the business press learns the hard way what happens when journalism never dares to be dull.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

One Vote Away

Republicans could win control of the entire federal government in November. So why won't the Democrats talk about it?

BY NICHOLAS CONFESSORE

IF YOU WERE TO CHOOSE A SINGLE RACE that sums up what's at stake this fall, it would have to be the one in South Dakota. To political insiders in Washington, the matchup between Democratic Sen. Tim Johnson and his Republican challenger, Rep. John Thune, is considered this season's defining contest between the two national parties. While Johnson is a protégé of Democratic Majority Leader Tom Daschle, Thune is the hand-picked candidate of President George W. Bush. So it's no surprise that Daschle and Bush have gone all out for their respective men, raising gobs of out-of-state money, recruiting talented campaign workers, and extracting promises of aid from friendly special interest groups.

After all, what's at stake isn't just the careers of two able politicians, but the entire balance of power in Washington. The GOP already controls the White House, the Supreme Court, and the House of Representatives. The Democrats control the Senate, but by only one vote. Polls of the handful of competitive Senate races indicate that control of the chamber is a toss-up. And while Democrats are optimistic about retaking the House, Republicans are increasingly sure that their larger war chests and a late-campaign public focus on national security threats will keep them in power. So if Johnson loses, and the Democrats don't win elsewhere, then, for the first time since 1953, the GOP would control both Congress and the White House for at least two years. Throw in the Supreme Court, and Republicans will have won control of the entire federal government for the first time since 1929. With that kind of power, it would take only a few years for the Republican Party to fundamentally reshape American government in ways that can't be undone no matter which party wins in 2004—from more tax cuts that would bankrupt Washington for decades, to a continued unilateralist foreign policy that would wreak further havoc on international institutions, to judicial precedents that would permanently cripple the ability of the federal government to grapple with social and economic problems. By any reasonable measure, the most pivotal issue facing voters in this congressional election is control of Congress itself.

What is surprising is that almost no one is talking about the election this way. These days, Johnson and Thune spend most of their time arguing over who would be a better defender of ethanol subsidies. The hottest election issue in South Dakota is whether meatpackers should be able to own livestock. When George W. Bush breezed through this otherwise little-noticed state to raise a few hundred thousand dollars for Thune, he stuck to farm aid. The only open fight between Bush and Daschle regarding South Dakota so far was last April, when Bush almost didn't invite Daschle to the opening of a local ethanol plant. Johnson rarely even mentions Washington—except to say that, if elected, he would work closely with President Bush to bring home the bacon for South Dakota.

But Johnson's not alone. Across the country, Democratic politicians don't want to talk about the one thing that every Democratic politician is worrying about. Instead, conventional wisdom holds that "issues"—Social Security, prescription drugs—are the best route to victory. Even this past summer, as metastasizing corporate scandals and Bush's falling poll numbers emboldened the Democrats to launch more attacks on the White House and the GOP, party leaders cautioned that candidates should stick to the policy agenda. Republicans, meanwhile,

NICHOLAS CONFESSORE *is an editor of* The Washington Monthly.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

are smart enough not to draw attention to their potential sweep. As a result, even though most Americans—especially swing voters—strongly prefer divided government, most voters aren't really aware that Republicans are one seat away from controlling all three branches of the federal government for the first time in more than 80 years. It's a mistake that could very well cost the Democrats this election—and much more.

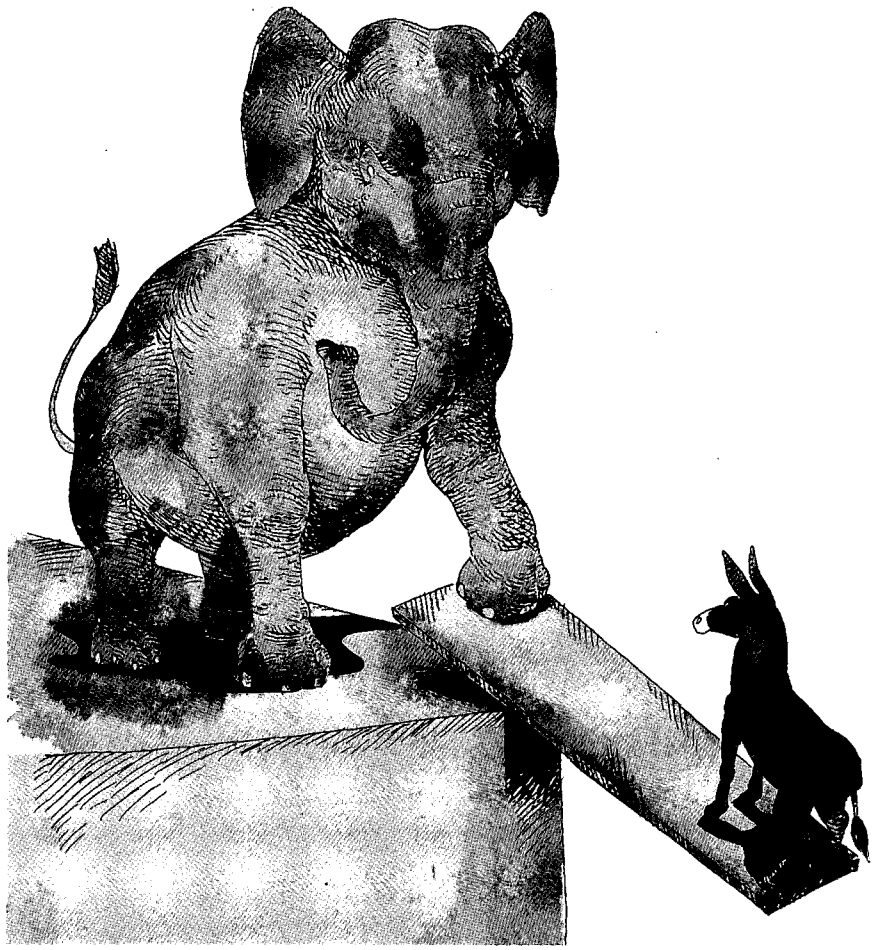
The New Repulicans

To understand why one-party rule under the Republicans would be so momentous this time around, it's necessary to understand why it wasn't such a big deal last time. The two years during which GOP President Dwight Eisenhower presided over a Republican Congress were relatively placid. One cause was the political gulf between Eisenhower, a moderate Republican hand-picked by the Dewey branch of the party, and his congressional wing, which was controlled by rock-ribbed Taft Republicans. Another was the general passivity of the party—and politics—as a whole. Although congressional Republicans occasionally got out of hand, as they did during Joe McCarthy's inquisition, they had more or less accommodated themselves to the New Deal. Significant policy change, like school desegregation, tended to begin and end in the courts.

Nor was Eisenhower an exception. During the 20th century, more than half of all elections have produced unified government. But those governments have been paralyzed, passive, or moderate as often as they've been productive, active, or radical. Herbert Hoover was a famous do-nothing during the two years his party controlled Congress. Theodore Roosevelt had big plans but was fought constantly by his own Republican Congress, while Harry Truman's accomplishments came in spite of the Southern conservative Democrats who ran Congress during the first four of his six years. And Ronald Reagan had a massive political impact on the country despite never having a Republican majority in the House.

What matters most, it turns out, is less the unity itself than the political temper of the president, the character of the leadership in Congress, and the ideological coherence—or lack thereof—of the party in power. And only twice before in the 20th century have the powers of unified government been yoked to an active, coherent party under a popular president: the first six years of Franklin Roosevelt's presidency, and the first two years of Lyndon B. Johnson's second term. Each president came into office on a landslide that gave the majority party ideological coherence and produced, in turn, tectonic shifts in national policy—the New Deal under Roosevelt and the Great Society under Johnson.

So what would the government look like under President George W. Bush, House Speaker Dennis J. Hastert, Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, and Chief Justice William Rehnquist? Far closer to the FDR/LBJ model



Art by Wesley Bedrosian

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

than to the Eisenhower model. Today's GOP is more ideologically coherent and more politically disciplined than at any point in the party's modern history—enough, in fact, to overcome slim congressional majorities and lack of a public mandate. The party's few congressional moderates are cowed and marginal; its leadership is almost exclusively Southern and conservative. Today's GOP is also an activist party, with a sweeping and, in some respects, radical conservative agenda for reversing the existing political order. "Given the deeply conservative character of this administration and the deeply conservative character of the Republican Party at this moment," says Columbia University historian Alan Brinkley, "this could be a moment in which very dramatic changes could occur."

With full control of Washington, the GOP could totally reshape American government in just a few years.

When Conservatives Attack

But don't take Brinkley's word for it. As it happens, Americans had a chance to test-drive this particular scenario. During the first four months of Bush's presidency, when the GOP controlled both the House and the Senate, Republican rule was ruthlessly partisan and deeply radical.

Early on, Republican Washington battled to place a controversial and polarizing ex-senator, John Ashcroft, in the highest law enforcement office in the land. Republican Washington used its majorities in the House and Senate to reverse the promulgation of groundbreaking new workplace safety regulations, summarily dismissing a 10-year review process that was launched by the first Bush administration. On the domestic policy front, the GOP's chief accomplishment was the passage of two fiscally hazardous tax cuts, one a 10-year cut on marginal tax rates and another temporarily eliminating the estate tax—each of which was presaged on a series of audacious lies. (To take just one: Bush frequently claimed that "by far the vast majority of my tax cuts go to the bottom end of the spectrum," which was demonstrably untrue—unless the "bottom end of the spectrum" were defined as the "poorest" 99.99 percent of the country.) On the foreign policy front, Republican Washington studiously ignored the growing Middle Eastern crisis, holding that the right policy was ipso facto the opposite of what the Clinton administration had done.

In just a few months, Republican Washington also produced an unpopular energy bill consisting mostly of handouts to the petroleum industry; canned a new, tougher standard for arsenic in the nation's water supplies; reinstituted a gag order on foreign family planning programs; and passed a Patients' Bill of Rights so toothless that nobody remembers it anymore. When an energy crisis struck California, Republican Washington for months ignored pleas from the West Coast and refused to ask the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to stop price-gouging—instead preferring to "watch California burn," as one local congressman put it at the time.

For liberals and most Democrats, of course, this little preview was something of a nightmare. But though it's hard to remember now, polls showed that they weren't alone: Most Americans had judged their taste of one-party rule to be sour. By summer 2001, Bush's approval rating had dropped to the mid-50s—a low that had been reached by only Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton at similar points in their terms. The Democrats had overtaken Bush on the question of who should set the policy agenda in Washington. Across the board, voters wanted more compromise from the White House, not less. And most tellingly, less than half of voters, according to a *Washington Post*/ABC News poll taken in June 2001, wanted the country to continue in the direction Bush was taking it. It was these voters who most loudly applauded Sen. Jim Jeffords's timely defection from Republican ranks on May 24, which put the Senate in Democratic hands.

But those four months of one-party rule were nothing compared to what the real deal will be like if the GOP wins back the Senate this fall. Unfinished business from 2001 would be up first: permanent repeal of the estate tax; permanent institution of the income-tax cut; passage of Bush's energy plan (including provisions to drill in Arctic National Wildlife Refuge); a partial-birth abortion ban; money for the technically unfeasible national missile defense system; repeal of the Alternative Minimum Tax; redefinition of the Roadless Area Conservation Rule that protects more than 50 million acres of federal land from logging; and a welter of special-interest corporate tax breaks that didn't make it into Bush's big cut. "What changes is that the president's able to get his agenda considered," says Charles Black, a leading Republican consultant and former adviser to Ronald Reagan and the elder George Bush. "You would have a unified agenda and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a predictable order of business."

That business would almost certainly include a serious effort at tort reform—like eliminating the 200-year-old principle of "joint and several liability" in civil suits, making it easier for corporate defendants to wiggle out of court judgments. Republicans would likely push to have Bush "unsign" the Kyoto accords on global warming and the 1996 Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, both anathema to many conservatives. Big business lobbyists would fan across the Hill, demanding "regulatory relief"—or federal subsidies, depending on the need—in ways large and small. Congress and the White House might even try to implement one of the three privatization plans put forth by the Commission to Strengthen Social Security, none of them demonstrably likely to make the system solvent over the long term. And now that the Supreme Court's July ruling in *Zelman, et al. v. Simmons-Harris* has resuscitated the voucher issue, proponents of "school choice" are already at work building momentum for an "experimental" national voucher program.

But the GOP agenda does not consist merely of policy choices. For conservatives fundamentally opposed to much of what the modern federal government does, changing the size of the game board is crucial. The most significant acts of a unified Republican government would be to wall off particular options, essentially rigging the system to insulate their agenda from future electoral setbacks. Many changes sought by the GOP, for instance, will be the kind that never require reauthorization, which normally permits Congress to tinker with previously passed legislation. Without institutional pressure from Democrats in either chamber, the White House can easily drop federal lawsuits against polluters and other corporate malefactors, inducing political and legal inertia against new lawsuits in the future. Or they can rewrite administrative laws on workplace regulation, establishing bodies of precedent that require enormous political power to overturn.

The preferred tool of retrenchment, however, is cutting taxes. For many voters, tax cuts are an end in and of themselves: a bigger paycheck in the mail. For professional conservatives, however, tax cuts are a means. When Republicans succeed in cutting taxes, Democrats have to waste precious political capital raising them—even when voters, in theory, strongly favor the programs thus preserved. If Democrats aren't able to do so—as was the case for many years before Bill Clinton did it in 1993—government is starved of revenue, endangering even popular programs like Social Security and Medicare.

And that's the point. Bankrupt Social Security and Medicare, and you bankrupt two programs that are pillars of the Democratic Party and of Washington's involvement in national life, denying voters popular government services and, over the long term, divorcing them from the very idea of government as a force for good. Similar thinking animates the conservative mania for education vouchers. That experimental voucher programs have yet to prove effective is of little consequence to conservative strategists, who see them primarily as a way to shrink the government. "If you went to complete school choice, you'd take half the state and local government and make it, in effect, a part of the private sector," muses conservative strategist Grover Norquist. "If you take Social Security, and allow people to put some of that money in the market, that privatizes a quarter of the federal government. The smarter guys on the right want to accomplish those two things and then the flat tax."

But even more important than tax cuts, vouchers, tort reform, or the environment are the courts. Ever since the early years of the Republican realignment, control of the federal courts has been the chief long-range goal for conservative activists of the religious and libertarian persuasions. During the 1980s, membership organizations like the Federalist Society groomed future judges, while corporate-funded law and economics programs developed a body of jurisprudence profoundly antithetical to most forms of federal environmental and workplace regulation. During the 1990s, Senate Republicans engineered a vacancy crisis to save slots on the federal bench for the appointees of an eventual GOP president. Were Republicans to gain control of the Senate in November, they would be well-prepared to take advantage of the moment,

Employment Opportunity

The Washington Monthly is looking for a Development Director to create and run its fundraising program. The prestigious D.C.-based national magazine of politics, government, and "neo-liberal" ideas has recently changed management and become a nonprofit. This is a great opportunity for an entrepreneurial-minded fundraiser who wants his or her efforts to have a direct impact on the nation's public policy debate. Candidates for the position must have extensive connections with and experience raising funds from national public policy-oriented foundations. Candidates must also be able to set up and manage fundraising drives and events, and help select and motivate a board of advisers whose job will be to help raise funds.

To inquire with salary requirements or for more information, please contact associate publisher Christina Larson at 202-393-5155 or christina@washingtonmonthly.com.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

packing the federal circuits with 45-year-old Antonin Scalias. "If every judge Bush had nominated by April was confirmed tomorrow," notes Elliot Mincberg, vice-president of People for the American Way, "there would be Republican majorities on 10 of the 13 circuits in the land. Given current projections for retirement, by the end of 2004, a Republican president and Senate could easily have appointed a majority to every federal circuit court in the country." Tax cuts can be repealed. But judges serve for life.

This vision would rightly alarm any right-thinking Democrat—and the great majority of independent voters, as well. It's a threat that is real, that won't go away, and that plays in every swing district in America. But not a single Democrat has bothered to explain the dangers of GOP one-party rule on the campaign trail, in a major speech, or in Congress itself. Why?

National Lampooned

For most Democratic politicians, consultants, and strategists, running on a national campaign based on the threat of a GOP takeover runs counter to a vast body of received wisdom on how to win a midterm election. Successful candidates, they argue, are positive, emphasize their personal achievements, and play to purely local concerns. When it's necessary to articulate broader themes, like saving Social Security, candidates are encouraged to express them as distillations of local values—as in, "Saving Social Security is a Missouri value." "If you ask people if they want divided government, they say yes," says Democratic pollster Mark Mellman. "There's just no evidence that they vote on that sentiment."

Partly, it's because they can't. Structurally, American elections are stacked against national campaigns. Unlike in, say, Israel or England, Americans don't pull the lever for a political party on election day; they vote for an individual candidate. And that vote typically hinges on the particular strengths and weaknesses of the candidate and on what are perceived as local issues. "Education is important to people because of your local school," says Peter Brodnitz, a consultant at the marquee Democratic firm Penn & Schoen, "not because of the federal education system." Moreover, only a tiny percentage of seats are actually competitive in any given election, most of them in those states and districts with high numbers of "nonaligned" voters who don't care too much about whether you're a Republican or a Democrat. Taken together, the result is that issues like party label and control of Congress—which consultants describe as "procedural"—generally don't drive elections. "'Having a check on Bush' is a bank shot," says Brodnitz. "It doesn't have direct application to people's concerns."

From time to time, of course, the conventional wisdom goes out the window—and a national campaign actually helps dethrone the majority party. But to overcome this structural inertia, the pros argue, you need some combination of the following: pots of money to fund a national advertising campaign; an effective, influential leader; unpopular opponents; and, if possible, a big national issue that cuts across regional and cultural lines. In 1994, the GOP had almost all of the above. Bill Clinton was suffering a major backlash; the congressional Democrats as a whole were widely perceived as corrupt, dictatorial, and mired in scandal. GOP donors and activists were energized, while the congressional Republicans had a charismatic leader in Newt Gingrich. Nevertheless, several influential Democrats in the White House—including Clinton adviser Harold Ickes, White House pollster Stan Greenberg, and *de facto* campaign chair Tony Coelho—thought they could counter with their own kind of nationalization. During the summer of 1994, they urged Democratic candidates to frame the coming election as a contest between "Clintonomics" (the success of which had yet to materialize) and "Reaganomics" (which had yet to be discredited in the eyes of voters).

It's not clear that very many Democratic candidates ever adopted the White House's suggestions. But in the days after the GOP landslide, Ickes, Greenberg, Coelho, and the nationalization strategy took the blame along with Clinton and his various policy failures, helping to cement the conventional wisdom and scare the Democrats away from anything that even resembled 1994's campaign. Those who had argued against nationalization, such as Bob Squire, Mark Penn, and Dick Morris, rose to become the party's top strategists. Over the next few years, their line of thinking would come to dominate the party's approach not just to campaign strategy, but also to national politics at the day-to-day level. (What were Morris's micro-issues—school uniforms, the V-chip—if not an attempt to localize the presidential agenda?)

If anything, the case against nationalization has seemed especially strong this year. The Republicans have the bully pulpit and the most popular politician in America, George W. Bush. Electorally, the bulk of open or competitive races are in states like Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, Georgia, and North Carolina, where it doesn't pay to advertise your party affiliation. Other elections hinge on idiosyncratic local issues, like the proposed demolition of Oregon's Condit Dam (the key issue between Democratic incumbent Brian Baird and GOP challenger Trent Matson). The party has no unifying national leader. Without the White House, the Democrats lack the infrastructure to formulate a national mes-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sage—or the money to get it out. The only national issue that cuts across districts and states is the war on terrorism, and while it won't give Republicans as big a boost this fall as they once hoped for, it certainly won't play to Democratic strengths. For many Democrats, begging for a chance to block Dubya just won't cut it. "I would not want to bank my campaign," says Mark Mellman, "on convincing voters that you should vote for me so that Democrats can stop bad Republican bills."

Even the corporate scandals have a downside: It's not clear that voters blame the Republicans, especially after Congress's near-unanimous passage of accounting reform legislation in August. Indeed, by the end of the summer, top Democrats like Rep. Nita Lowey (D-N.Y.), who chairs the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, had already concluded that the Democrats should back down and "stick to bread-and-butter issues"—Social Security, prescription drugs, and education. Instead of using Enron, WorldCom, and Andersen to build a case against Republican stewardship of Congress, Democratic staffers have scoured the records of individual GOP candidates in search of shady business deals and tax arrangements that could be painted as Enronesque. In other words, the Democrats have taken a potential national issue and tried their utmost to localize it.

Among key Democrats, conventional wisdom dictates that elections are won by going local. There's just one big problem: It hasn't worked.

They Have Issues

But the conventional wisdom has one big problem: It hasn't worked. In each of the three election cycles since 1994, the Democrats have run mostly local, issues-based campaigns that rarely involved a public discussion about taking back Congress—a theme, many Democrats felt, that would make them sound power-hungry. In each election, Republican willingness to downplay their own agenda and campaign on Democratic themes neutralized most of the Democrats' advantages on "bread-and-butter issues." And in each one, the Democrats have made only marginal and diminishing gains in the House: nine seats in 1996, five in 1998, and two in 2000. (In the Senate they have done better, but only just enough to win parity in 2000. In 1996 and 1998, the Democrats lost two seats and won zero, respectively.) Granted, there are reasons that go beyond style and message—the declining number of competitive seats, for instance, and the severe atrophy of the congressional party's campaign machinery. It may also be that gerrymandering has finally pushed congressional elections into a stalemate, insulating the GOP from the possibility of a single major election loss.

But perhaps the conventional wisdom isn't so wise after all. Take Bush's popularity. For a year, Democrats have been mesmerized by a single number: Bush's job approval rating, which, though down from its previous highs, continues to be strong. They've paid much less attention to the underlying numbers—the ones that tell the story of a public united behind the commander-in-chief, but unhappy with the administration's policies and deeply distrustful of the Republican majority in the House. At the end of 2001, according to the CNN/*USA Today*/Gallup poll, nearly three-quarters of adults nationwide thought the country was going in the right direction. By August that number was at 47 percent. In midsummer, the major polls showed an average 5-point generic Democratic advantage at the polls; by late August, CNN/*USA Today*/Gallup had the Democrats up by 8 percent. The point is that the Democrats don't need to campaign against Bush or engineer a landslide to keep the Senate or take back the House. They just need to get a small number of Americans to vote in practice the preference for divided government they already display in theory.

Would that require a large campaign chest and a national advertising campaign? Campaign consultants say so—but campaign consultants always say so, because that's how they make the most money. That doesn't mean they're always right. By most accounts, the Democrats' biggest election success since 1994 was 1998, when they were expected to lose more than a dozen seats and instead picked up five. But 1998 was the Democrats' most underfunded campaign in 10 years. Fundraising scandals at the Democratic National Committee in 1997 had scared away donors and decimated the party's finance operations; as a result, the DNC had less than half its usual budget for political operations and the DCCC had less than $2 million for radio and TV ads. So, what was their secret weapon? Clinton's impending impeachment trial, which convinced many moderates that the GOP was too dangerous to be in charge.

The challenge for Democrats today, then, is to make voters aware that the GOP is no less dangerous this time around. But Democrats don't need the White House in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

order to get their message out. For months after the Republican landslide of 1980, Ronald Reagan's mastery of the bully pulpit, a governing majority (190 House Republicans plus 40 or so Boll Weevils), and overwhelming popularity left the Democrats a voiceless and disorganized opposition party. The rump Democratic caucus was considered irrelevant; House Speaker Tip O'Neill was considered "big, fat, and out of control," as one GOP congressman put it. But eventually, a young O'Neill aide named Chris Matthews set about turning his boss into Reagan's opposite number—convincing the television networks, for instance, to let O'Neill respond to almost any announcement the administration made. Under O'Neill, the Democrats became an effective opposition party, positioned themselves to take advantage of the early '80s recession, and gained 20 seats in the fall of 1982.

Today's top Democrats are already in high demand for chat shows, television interviews, and other kinds of unpaid exposure. They don't need to beg for airtime. If just the top Democrats in town—Tom Daschle, Dick Gephardt, Hillary Clinton, John Kerry, Terry McAuliffe, and the rest—spent a week talking about what would happen if the Republicans take control, buzz alone would create national exposure. And if that fails, there's another set of messengers to enlist: the 400 or so Democrats campaigning across the country this fall. No Democrat, even the most conservative one, likes the idea of the Republicans running the country alone.

Losing Their Religion

The Democrats, of course, may choose to play it safe. They can choose to spend the next month talking about why their prescription drug plan is better than the GOP's prescription drug plan. They can warble on about Democratic "priorities." They can pray for Bush's economic team to continue making stupid gaffes, for voters to blame Republicans for the corporate scandals, and for terrorists to elude the FBI until December. They probably won't lose very many seats. They may even gain a few.

But it's a hell of a gamble. By refusing to tell voters what's really at stake, the Democrats are relegating the election to a mere contest of policy proposals, proposals that few Republicans will claim to be against. In the end, no issue will matter unless the Democratic Party gives voters a real reason to vote against the Republicans—one that encompasses all the agenda items and forces Americans to think about the real consequences of Republican rule. If the country wakes up on November 6 with a Republican House and Senate, the Democrats may spend the next 20 years wondering why they didn't. ●

The Washington Monthly's Monthly Journalism Award

Jason Cherkis

"The Insider's Guide to Real Policing"

Washington City Paper, August 16-22, 2002

Jason Cherkis uses humor and sarcasm to present a withering portrait of Washington D.C.'s police department. Addressing his article to those who might consider becoming a D.C. cop, Cherkis discloses what District residents have long known about the city's finest. He shows how 10 percent of the department's officers do all of the work, while the remaining 90 percent spend their time cruising for chicks, beating up suspects for sport, and yes, hanging out at 7-11. Cherkis exposes all the cops' secrets: When the department's homicide unit failed to meet its target goals, the police chief simply lowered the goal and declared victory. Cherkis' years of covering the police department are reflected in this insider's look at government as rarely seen in the local press with the deadly summary: "Being a cop means knowing you will always get a raise no matter how little you do."

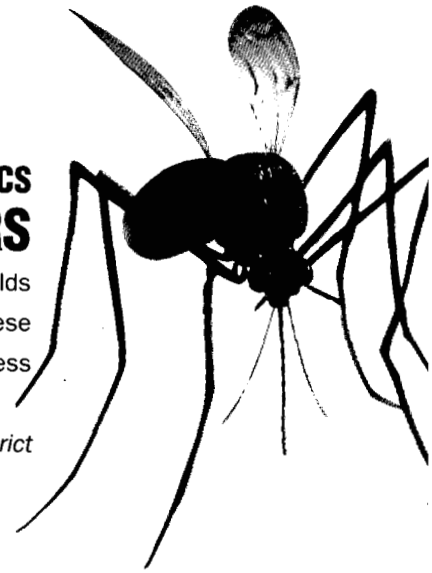
The Monthly Journalism Award is presented each month to one or more newspaper, magazine, radio, or television stories (or series of stories) that demonstrate a commitment to the public interest. We are particularly interested in reporting that explains the successes and failures of government agencies at all levels and of other institutions such as the media, corporations, unions, and foundations that contribute to the existence or solution of public problems. Please send nominations (including a copy of the article or broadcast text) to The Washington Monthly Journalism Award, 733 15th Street, NW, Suite 1000, Washington, DC 20005. Or e-mail us at editors@washingtonmonthly.com. Nominations for stories run in September 2002 are due October 5, 2002.

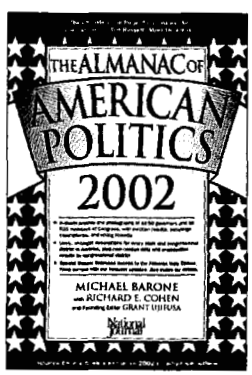
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT AMERICAN POLITICS
INCLUDING BLOOD-SUCKING WHINERS

"Behind the Shore are swamp and flatland, the Pine Barrens and vegetable fields that give New Jersey the name 'Garden State.' Growth has been slow in these small towns and gas station intersections, communities in whose eerie calmness in the summer you can hear mosquitoes whining."

—*The Almanac of American Politics on New Jersey's 2nd Congressional District*





THE ALMANAC OF AMERICAN POLITICS 2002

With National Journal's *The Almanac of American Politics 2002,* you get more than the standard political buzz. You get a real taste for what's eating politicians. Michael Barone's first-hand analysis of every state, governor and member of Congress mixes hard facts with a true-to-life feel for the people, places and perceptions that shape American politics. Get the real story behind what's bugging people. To order your copy, call us toll free at 1-800-356-4838 or visit www.nationaljournal.com/almanac.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Money for Nothing

States are finally collecting money from deadbeat dads. Now, if they'd only get it to the moms.

BY SANDY BERGO

LONG AFTER HER DIVORCE, JANE Baker had thought of child support as a "bonus." Sometimes her ex-husband sent the checks to her home in Ohio, sometimes he didn't. Usually he didn't. Over nine years, her ex-husband, who lived across the border in Michigan, had piled up a debt of $68,000 in unpaid support. He had even left a decent job as an Army recruiter, Baker says, because Uncle Sam was about to garnishee his pay for child support. But when catching so-called "deadbeat dads" became a *cause celebre* in the 1990s, Baker, like millions of other divorced single mothers, thought her time had come. Tired of waiting for her ex-husband to send checks on his own, Baker kept up the pressure on state and local child support agencies to get him to pay. Finally, after nine years of prodding caseworkers, talking to lawyers, and appearing in court, her efforts paid off: A Michigan judge ordered Baker's ex-husband to send her $284 every two weeks—money she could use for an emergency room visit, braces, and senior-class photos for her two sons—or go to jail.

But still the checks came only intermittently. Once again, Baker assumed her husband was to blame. When she took him to court this time, however, she discovered he *had* been paying, through regular deductions from his paycheck. This time, it wasn't his fault. It was the fault of the government agency charged with collecting the money from him and sending it on to her. When I asked officials to look into Baker's case, it turned out that many checks had been delayed, one had been lost, and one payment was stuck in the agency's bank account. The fate of the last was especially infuriating: The Michigan agency had made a mistake on the check sent to Ohio, but when Ohio sent it back, Michigan decided not to reissue it. Why? Because a new state computer system couldn't display information on certain lost or corrected checks. And it wasn't fixed until September, when a programming upgrade kicked in. So a January payment from Baker's ex-husband has sat in a Michigan bank account for months—along with another $9.3 million owed to other parents much like her, the vast majority of them former welfare recipients entitled to the money under new welfare reform rules. "We know who the recipients are," says Jane Varner, the head of child support enforcement in Wayne County, Mich. "We just can't get it to them."

Michigan is not alone. Once upon a time, the biggest obstacle to child support for women like Baker was their ex-husbands. Today, though, state-run collection agencies have an impressive array of enforcement tools at their disposal, helping them collect billions in child support every year. But while states are getting better and better at collecting the money, they're getting worse at distributing that money to whom it's due. On any given day, the state agencies that collect child support are sitting on a pot

SANDY BERGO *is a Washington-based writer and former investigative producer for WBBM-TV in Chicago.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of gold worth hundreds of millions of dollars; on Sept. 30, 2001, the end of the last federal fiscal year, $738 million worth of child support had been paid in by parents, but not yet paid out to custodial parents and their children. For these parents, most of them women, deadbeat dads aren't the problem. Deadbeat states are.

And the crisis is intensifying. The problem of "undistributed collections," as the feds call it, has been mentioned during congressional hearings, but has received scant news coverage. Although federal officials are well aware of the problem, the Bush administration has so far declined to step in and mandate reforms. Meanwhile, by this fall, some two million single parents will have been kicked off or left welfare thanks to the pressure of time limits established in 1996's welfare reform law. Almost all of them are owed child support—money on which their ability to provide for themselves and their children in a post-welfare world depends.

While states are getting better at collecting child support, they're getting worse at distributing the money to whom it's due.

Collector's Guide

When Congress established state-operated child support programs in 1975, its intent wasn't to help children but to recoup welfare costs by, in effect, turning welfare into a debt that child support would partially repay. To receive welfare benefits, mothers signed over their rights to child support and agreed to help collection efforts by identifying the father and telling caseworkers where to find him. Women on welfare got little extra for their cooperation—$50 per month of the child support collected—and the state kept the rest until a mother's welfare debt was satisfied.

Not surprisingly, collection rates were low. States lacked the technology and infrastructure to pursue the fathers—many poor themselves—and mothers had little incentive to cooperate. During the 1980s and 1990s, the federal government expanded the role of state child support programs to help families who were not on the welfare rolls, in the hope of keeping them that way. To increase the odds of collecting support, the federal government helped the state agencies upgrade their information technology, providing improved record-keeping and better information-sharing between county and state officials and to the federal government. Adding a stick to the carrot, the federal government also began to assess multimillion-dollar penalties against states that missed federal deadlines for updating computer systems.

They succeeded, at least in part. Centralized payment centers were established in each state, to take control from inefficient or ineffective local officials and to lessen the burden on employers, who had previously been charged with deducting wages and getting the payments to a bewildering array of county offices. Thus armed, state agencies began cracking down on a wider pool of deadbeat dads. As collections rose, so did expectations. Federal, state, and local laws were changed to get tough on delinquent parents. Federal tax refunds were seized—state refunds, too, in some states. Prosecutors began to publicize their efforts to track down and punish deadbeat dads, winning them public acclaim and the parents better enforcement.

Eventually, former welfare recipients also began to benefit. When Congress decided to implement stricter welfare standards in 1996, they also changed the rules to allow former welfare recipients to keep a larger share of child support collected by the state. Congress also passed legislation that improved collections across the board. Some fathers, for instance, had frustrated collection efforts by switching jobs, staying one step ahead of wage deduction orders. Under the new law, authorities could much more quickly find out when delinquent parents switched jobs and ensure that wage deduction orders got to the new employers. States also got better access to information on bank accounts and began to seize the assets of deadbeats.

As the states got better at roping in recalcitrant parents, state agencies began collecting enormous amounts of money. Instead of the $1 billion collected back in the late 1970s, state agencies brought in a total of $12 billion in 1996. In 2001, with enforcement powers further enhanced, they brought in a whopping $19 billion.

"It's an imperfect world"

But there was a catch: The very reforms that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

boosted collection have overloaded the systems designed to deliver those funds to the families entitled to them. As a result, the more money states collect, the more goes undistributed. The dollar figure reported by the states to the federal government is a snapshot of the money held, undistributed, on one day—September 30 of each year. This figure has climbed rapidly over time. In 1999, the states reported $503 million in undistributed support. In 2000, it was $634 million. By 2001, it was $738 million. "The irony is, the better the collections, the bigger this problem will be," says Vicki Turetsky, senior staff attorney for the Center for Law and Social Policy, an advocacy group for low-income families.

In Michigan, a massive effort to link all counties through a statewide computer system had the perverse effect of freezing payments, including those to Jane Baker and hundreds of other mothers. When state officials decided last year to switch over to the new computer system to meet an Oct. 1, 2001, federal deadline—rather than pay a $49 million penalty—they soon discovered that the software didn't include the capabilities necessary for distributing some of the funds. In total, $9.3 million ended up frozen in the old county computer system for months. Many Michigan women who no longer get welfare and are desperate to get any child support they can will have had to wait almost an entire year for their full share of their child support. "While it's a wonderful system," concedes Wayne County official Jane Varner, "we've had our hurdles."

Another major problem has been a federal mandate for each state to launch a centralized office to process payments, taking the job over from the counties. While the overhauls have made collections more efficient—Sherri Heller, commissioner of HHS's Office of Child Support Enforcement, argues that the increase in undistributed funds suggests that the state units are doing a better job of keeping track of the money than the counties had been—they did create massive, if temporary, backlogs. In Alabama, this conversion delayed payments to Kendra Monroe for almost two years. Like many women, Monroe figured her ex-husband was to blame when his child support checks for their two young daughters stopped coming. She considered bringing him to court again, but he insisted the money was being deducted from his paychecks and sent to the state, as ordered. He even sent her payroll records from the construction company where he worked to prove it.

So she wrote to the Alabama Department of Human Resources, demanding information. They sent her a record of her account. It showed her ex-husband was telling the truth. He was indeed making payments to the state. She wrote the state again, demanding her money. Getting no reply, she wrote letter after letter, each one sounding more frustrat-

Who's Who

By Susan Threadgill

Is **Jon Corzine** angling to become the next head of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee? The wealthy New Jersey senator, a state-of-the-art Democratic liberal who's been in the Senate less than two years, has lent a helping hand to colleagues in need. During this election cycle, he's given $2,000 each to **Paul Wellstone, Max Cleland, Jean Carnahan**, and **Max Baucus**, all of whom are running tough re-election campaigns. He's also ponied up another $2,000 to **Maria Cantwell**, the former Real Network CEO who's had trouble paying off her '00 campaign debt in the wake of the stock market downturn, and to **Tom Strickland**, who's running an underdog campaign to knock off GOP senator **Wayne Allard** in Colorado. And in the last two years, he's given a total of $300,000 to the DSCC itself.

How deep does the conservative Federalist Society have its claws in the Justice Department? Pretty deep, according to the speakers list for the group's upcoming 20th-anniversary gala. It includes no fewer than six out of the department's 10 assistant attorney generals: **Ralph Boyd, Michael Chertoff, Viet Dinh, Charles James, Eileen O'Connor**, and **Tom Sansonetti.** And that doesn't even include Labor Secretary **Elaine Chao**, Energy Department general counsel **Lee Otis**, Health and Human Services general counsel **Alex Azar**, and deputy White House counsel **Tom Flanigan**, each of whom is also scheduled to speak. The keynote speaker, then, is someone whose career they have reason to celebrate: former independent counsel

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ed and angry. By her sixth letter, she was telling her local caseworker: "If your goal is not to help the children of Marshall County to get their due support and OBVIOUSLY [her emphasis] it is not, then perhaps you should find another position more suitable for your type." Monroe says it reminded her of the time, soon after her divorce, when a state worker shrugged her off as she tried to plead that she was struggling financially and needed help to track down her ex-husband for support. As she remembers it, the worker turned away, saying, "Everybody has hard times." Complains Monroe, "They don't care."

The head of Alabama's child support unit, Tom Bernier, says there are too few workers to be able to respond to all complaints. Bernier described a kind of bureaucratic triage in which complainants who holler loudest get attention. But hollering didn't help Monroe. It was only when I contacted Bernier's office that his staff looked into the matter and discovered a series of mistakes had been made.

It turned out that in Alabama, when Monroe's case was transferred to the new state office, there was a "conversion error"; an official had mistakenly decided that her child support was payable to the state to compensate for welfare benefits she had received. Although Monroe had been on welfare for about a year after her 1992 divorce, she has worked ever since. In her case, every dollar of the support the state of Alabama was holding belonged to her.

From October 2000 through May 2002, her ex-husband's payments accumulated in her account, adding up to $4,971. But no one in the state agency noticed it. "That shouldn't have happened," concedes Bernier. But he says with the large caseloads they have, "it is not uncommon. We ought to be doing more. It's an imperfect world. It does tend to be a resources issue. There are a lot of cases and a lot more that needs to be done."

Pay Dirt

But the growth in enforcement cannot account—alone—for the size of the backlog. Rather, much of the problem stems from a familiar combination of understaffing, underfunding, bureaucratic indifference, and outmoded procedure. For instance, one widespread problem is that families move without notifying child-support officials. Michigan didn't have a current address for the mother of John Rogers, and as a result, $21,000 paid by his father sat in a government bank account for three years. "Everything that could go wrong did go wrong," in this case, says Wayne County's Jane Varner.

Rogers's father, James, worked for a Ford Motor company steel plant outside Detroit, and from 1996 until 1999 his paychecks were garnished weekly. But in October 1999, he got a letter saying he was behind. He hired a lawyer, who forced Wayne County to do an audit. They found that $21,000 had been collect-

Kenneth W. Starr.

A congressional race in Arkansas may give the old adage "don't blame the messenger" a new twist: Don't blame the pollster. In the state's first district, an August poll by the respected firm Zogby International, headed by **John Zogby**, has Democratic incumbent **Marion Berry** up 63 percent to 21 percent over GOP challenger and former U.S. congressman **Tommy Robinson**. But when Robinson heard the results of the poll, according to the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, he didn't take it quietly. Referring to Zogby as "an Arab polling firm," he complained "I don't like an Arab running any poll that has to do with me because of my strong position on the war on terrorism." Zogby's father is of Lebanese ancestry; his brother **James Zogby** heads the Washington, D.C.-based Arab American Institute.

George W. Bush has appointed dozens of women—more than any other president—as senior White House staff. But his latest appointment won't earn any plaudits from feminists: Attorney General John Ashcroft recently named **Nancy M. Pfotenhauer**, president of the conservative Independent Women's Forum to the National Advisory Committee on Violence Against Women, a group that advises the Justice Department on implementation of the Violence Against Women Act of 1994. But the IWF not only opposed the 1994 legislation; it went to court to try and stop it from becoming law and has attacked it vehemently ever since. **Sally Satel**, author of *PC, M.D.*, has argued in the IWF journal that "the battered women's movement has outlived its useful beginnings," while columnist **Betsy Hart** predicted that the domestic violence law would "perpetuate false information, waste money and urge vulnerable women to mistrust all men." Says **Kim Gandy**, the president of the National Organization for Women: "I'm appalled, but I am not shocked."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ed, but not sent to his ex-wife, because she had moved without notifying the county of her new address. So the money didn't go to the child. Instead, the family collected welfare.

After the audit was done, the state took $11,000 to reconcile the welfare debt, and sent the rest to the mother. Rogers's current wife, Betty, asks a reasonable question: "Why didn't they call us?" The child support agency knew the money was coming from the father, and the father knew where the child was living. "To contact the non-custodial parent and ask where the custodial parent is, with the volume of cases we have, that is not standard procedure," Varner says. And, she adds, the law does not demand it. It only demands that the agency search for the non-paying parent. "We are making every effort to improve, and we are improving, but, do you know what I'm saying, there is some responsibility on the part of the custodial parent to tell us: 'We've moved.'"

Varner has a point. No doubt, a certain number of would-be child-support recipients fail in this respect. But partly because of the bureaucratic problems and backlogs, many parents still receive child support only sporadically, if at all. It stands to reason that those not getting support regularly won't necessarily remember to tell the child support agency they're moving. "Why would they think about notifying the Friend of the Court?" admits Mary Beth Kelly, chief judge of the Wayne County, Mich. Circuit Court, which oversees the child support office (known as Friend of the Court). "They've given up hope of getting child support."

Varner said she'd love to have enough staff to track down mothers. But her office has 247 employees for 220,000 child-support cases, almost 900 per worker, a caseload three times the national average. In Michigan, where state officials are coping with budget cuts for other social services, the resource issue is a question without a good answer. "Where do you put your resources?" asks Marcia McBrien, spokesman for the Michigan Supreme Court, which oversees county Friends of the Courts. "Today in state government everybody is strapped. Everybody is trying to do more with less."

Missing Persons

So what are states to do? With limited staff and

Special Thanks to the Contributors to the Scott Shuger Memorial Fund

Earlier this year, we were saddened by the untimely loss of our dear friend and former colleague, Scott Shuger. Many readers have since contributed generously to the Scott Shuger Memorial Fund, established by the Shuger family for the benefit of our underpaid editors and unpaid interns. On behalf of Scott's family, *The Washington Monthly* wishes to thank all those who have offered encouragement and support in remembering Scott.

Nancy and William Alberti
Kim Berghaus
Jon Boutin
Amy Branson
Ronald M. and Patricia B. Brave
The Brenner Family
Alice R. Buchalter
Sheila Clegg
Mr. and Mrs. Jesse M. Colvin
Edward and Gail Condren
Valerie Cullen
Karen J. Cunningham
Stephen Dickey and Ellen D. Finkelpearl
A. Stephen Dubansky
Harriet and Paul Dubansky
Gregg Easterbrook and Ann Kennelly
Edgar H. Ellis
James M. and Deborah Z. Fallows
R.A. Foakes
Fredda & Pete Ferguson
Stefan and Marya Gabriel
Lorraine Grant
Ellie Harrison
Marian, Brent, Matthew & William Hoffman
Mr. and Mrs. Philip A. Hoffman
Laura Lauder
Kitti Lawrence
Deborah S. Levinson
Dahlia H. Lithwick and Aaron J. Fein
Dana Lombardi
Jim and Carolyn MacDonald
Sandra McElwaine
Donka Minkova
Marianne Mortara
Joseph Nocera
Gabriela E. Nosari
Harriet L. Panitz
Fatima Penrose
Bernard and Frances Rubenstein
Jill Santonelli
Barbara & Bill Schiffman
June and Jerry Schiller
Carolyn See
Sandy and Kathy Shapiro
Dee Silberman
Naomi E. Silver
The Stanley & Linda Panitz Philanthropic Fund
Patty Stonesifer and Michael Kinsley
Hovig Tchalian
Alice Tetelman and Martin Wenick
June M. Thomas
Nicholas Thompson
Jeffrey Tlumak
Eric Umansky
Anneke Verhave
Amy Waldman
Stephen I. Yenser

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

resources, can child-support agencies be expected to track down mothers in the same way they track down fathers? Advocates say yes. Geraldine Jensen, president of the Association for Children for Enforcement of Support (ACES), a national advocacy group, has been raising the issue of undistributed collections every chance she gets. Her group has lobbied congressmen and senators and HHS officials to make changes that would force states to pay this money out quickly. "People have so many problems overcoming the disputes that occur when families break up, and then to have to overcome the barriers that government puts up when they hold on to the money, literally sends children to bed hungry," says Jensen. She wants Congress to require states to use state and national parent locators, now available for finding absent parents, to find families awaiting checks.

In fact, some states are already making it work. Nick Young, director of the child-support program in Virginia, says that simply updating addresses in their files was a key to reducing his state's undistributed collections. "I always tell my folks, if you want to find somebody, you can," says Young. "People are not trying to evade you. They are findable." His staff has access to a wide variety of databases and records to locate people, including banking and utility records. "We have interfaces with all the major utilities." After a move, he says, "eventually they will get a cell phone." His agency also tries to get contact names and phone numbers of relatives and employers for each parent, to improve their chances of finding families if they've moved by the time a support check comes in.

But it takes staff to do this. Two years ago, the state of Virginia had five people assigned to finding custodial parents. Now Young has 49 people devoted to the task. By contrast, Wayne County's agency doesn't have staff assigned exclusively to finding parents. Rather, it has 15 "parent locate" staff who also have other administrative duties. (The county also puts the names of custodial parents they can't find on their Web site, posts them in court buildings, and even passes lists out in churches in an effort to find parents before the funds are considered abandoned property by the state.) And while the agency's new computer systems allow them to search employment and credit bureau databases—which help them find some parents—the burden is still on the parent to notify the agency, not vice versa.

Disservice Department

Virginia's experience suggests that distribution problems can be solved with the right combination of funding and practice. You'd think, then, that federal authorities would make sure the best practices developed in one state are exported to the rest. Yet while officials at the Department of Health and Human Services acknowledge the problem, they are reluctant to intervene. "It is truly an important issue to reduce the undistributed collections—dramatically," says David Siegel, deputy commissioner of the Office of Child Support Enforcement within HHS, which oversees child-support programs in the states, and pays two-thirds of administrative costs. But "not everything needs a regulation to fix," he says. "Not everything requires a new law." Siegel's boss, Sherri Heller, is satisfied that the states are trying their best and don't need a push from the feds. In fact, she told me she counts on the news media to apply that pressure. States take action, she says, "because they don't want to get bad press."

Instead of recommending new mandates to force states to solve the problem, the Bush administration has turned to consultants— and excuses.

Instead of recommending new mandates to force states to solve the problem, the Bush administration turned to consultants—and excuses. Excuses that minimize the problem, by pointing out that undistributed funds are only three percent of total collections; excuses that obscure the problem, by pointing out that a portion—they've never bothered to figure out how much—of the undistributed money can be held legally for six months because it comes from tax refunds. To confuse matters more, the states are allowed, under federal law, to take two days to process the undistributed money before paying it out. But no one knows how much of the money is being processed at any given time. (Heller is "wrestling" with whether to mandate more detailed reporting from the states.)

The consultants, meanwhile, are hired both to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

give "technical assistance" to states that are looking for causes and solutions and to survey states to hear their explanations for why collected money sits undistributed. Not surprisingly, these consultants have discovered the same problems activists and local officials have been complaining about for years: difficulties in finding good addresses for custodial parents, for instance, or payments coming into the agency without enough identifying information. Even more frustrating is that much of what the consultants have reported was already known to HHS. The last time the agency did an audit of these funds was in 1997, when the department looked at 11 states and found most were underreporting the amounts that were undistributed. In some states, the audit found, "undistributed collections were not always being handled and processed in a timely manner; unidentified collections were not being researched in a timely manner and unclaimed checks which were returned to States' treasurers were not being reported properly."

But thanks to the 1996 welfare law—which, in part, was intended to reduce paperwork for the states—HHS doesn't audit the programs any more. Instead of audits, HHS relies on "self-assessments" performed by the states themselves—that is, the same states that have already been shown to underreport the problem. And without audited figures to guide them, HHS officials admit they don't really know the true size of the problem. "I can't quantify how much of the [$738 million] that the states report is a problem of reporting and how much is a problem of it not getting to families," says Heller.

Show Them the Money

"This is a national problem," says Nick Young of Virginia. He is a recent past president of a national group of child-support directors and speaks to his counterparts around the country about the issue of undistributed collections. "We have a saying here, 'It is better to have not collected it, than to collect it and let it sit,'" says Young. The amounts each state reports as undistributed range widely, from a low of $332,000 in Colorado to a high of $190 million in California. State audits and news accounts have told stories of troubles getting money to families in Illinois, Tennessee, Ohio, Florida, Georgia, and California. Young says Virginia started working on the problem after meeting with Jensen of ACES a few years ago. "She was right," he says. "We weren't paying attention to it. We meant well," Young says. "It was not through malfeasance. It wasn't mean-spiritedness. There was just too much going on."

Calls made for this article finally got results for Kendra Monroe and Jane Baker. Alabama sent Monroe the $4,971 that had accumulated over two years. Michigan traced Baker's missing check and sent it to her. The other Michigan families—owed a total of $9.3 million—had to wait for the September computer fix. Both women were pleased to get the money, outraged about how difficult it had been, and worried about other families in the same spot. "I'm not the only one this is happening to," says Baker. "It's such a struggle all the time. It's not been easy." As Monroe puts it, "Just imagine all the women out there they're doing the same thing to, if they don't have somebody to push it through."

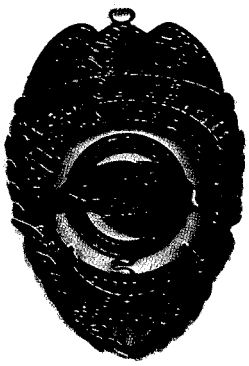
But that somebody is—or should be—the federal government. Because the child-support collection system was originally designed to recoup welfare costs, it's still structured to favor collection over distribution. As a result, today, the federal government pays financial incentives to the states if they do a good job collecting child support and penalizes them if they don't comply with federal requirements. Yet there are no incentives for doing a good job—or penalties for doing a bad job—of distributing the support to families. It makes perfect sense for the federal government to push states to reduce undistributed collections, especially if welfare reform is to remain a success. According to a University of Wisconsin study of divorced women in that state, those who leave welfare are much more likely to return to welfare if they don't get child support. Without support, there was a 31-percent chance the woman would return to welfare within six months. With support, even a small amount, there was only a 10-percent chance of returning to welfare.

This fall, Congress will get a second chance. The welfare reauthorization law being debated specifically addresses the issue of undistributed collections, and if passed, will direct HHS to take a leading role in estimating the size of the problem, figuring out how long the delays are and how to shorten them, and recommending to Congress how to reduce undistributed collections. Which is exactly how it should be. After all, child-support enforcement in the United States is a federal program in all but name. The federal government calls the shots. It's their law. For the most part, it's their money, too. Now, it's time for the federal government to make sure the program works. ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Tidbits & Outrages

A POLICE HEROINE?



An El Paso, Texas, police officer nearly lost her job after supervisors decided her name was "inappropriate." Christine Lynn O'Kane's badge read: C. O'KANE. "It is clear that the intention was to refer to the drug cocaine," the department's personnel director complained. O'Kane appealed to the Civil Service Commission and won, then adopted her maiden name, Whitaker.

All In The Family

Two Japanese exchange students visiting Salt Lake City were inadvertently placed with a family of polygamists. The program coordinator apologized, but explained that she thought it would be best if the girls stayed with a large family. The mayor's office promised to improve screening.

Parental Pacifier

Prompted by grim necessity, an Israeli company recently unveiled a bulletproof car seat for babies. It retails for $2,000 and is marketed toward Jewish settlers in the West Bank.

BRING ME HIS HEAD ON A PLATE!

The Rhode Island motor vehicles department will soon begin offering specialty license plates featuring an unusual state luminary: Mr. Potato Head. The plastic spud, manufactured in Pawtucket, is celebrating his 50th anniversary.

Play Bald

The Mahoning Valley Scrappers, a minor-league baseball team, recently held a "Jim Traficant Night" in honor of the local lawmaker who was expelled from Congress in July. Anyone who—like the flamboyant Ohio congressman—wore a toupee or was the son of a truck driver was admitted free.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Spanish Disquisition

Or, how a bookish Gringa learned to stop worrying and love el idioma.

BY LIESL SCHILLINGER

IN THE FIRST VOLUME OF THE CHILDREN'S series *The Chronicles of Narnia*, two brothers and two sisters travel through a wardrobe into a magic land where they are entertained by beavers. In the presence of these beavers (who can talk), the children hear the name of "Aslan"—the powerful golden lion who (they are told) benignly watches over all the creatures of the realm. A warm, joyous feeling steals over the three good children, Lucy, Peter, and Susan, when they hear the name "Aslan." But the bad child (for alas, there is a bad child), Edmund, shudders with loathing when he hears the name. The syllables that delight his siblings make his flesh creep; what they interpret as good, he interprets as threatening and sinister. Eventually, to the great relief of the beavers and everyone else, Edmund comes around.

The reason I bother to pass on this morsel of juvenilia is that, as a child growing up in university towns in the Midwest and Southwest, I studied French and German and Latin with fervid devotion, but reacted to the sound of Spanish pretty much the same way Edmund reacted to the sound of Aslan. Even then, 20 years ago—before J. Lo and Shakira, John Leguizamo, Vicente Fox, Nuevo Latino cuisine, *Y Tu Mamá También*, and Penelope Cruz—even then, nobody would have refuted the fact that Spanish was a useful language for a North American to learn; and I certainly accepted its popularity and practicality. Nonetheless, for me, Spanish lacked some indefinable prestige that I associated with other foreign languages. I had an illogical distaste for Spanish, and the Edmund/Aslan parable is the best way to explain it.

I often have encountered other linguists, non-linguists, professors, and people in other professions who confess that they, too, dislike the sound of Spanish. "It's ugly," a typical Spanish-averse friend—an elegant woman with an advanced degree and knowledge of two other foreign languages—once declared to me without embarrassment. She passed on a bit of gossip she had heard and found amusing. Apparently, Ivana Trump's son, Donald Jr., once told his mother he wanted to learn Spanish. "Why?" she had retorted. "So you can speak with the servants?"

Like her, anti-*Español* Americans don't see the point of learning Spanish (or, more tactfully, say they just don't care for it). Well-meaning detractors say their objections are aesthetic; although French is plenty nasal, it is Spanish that strikes them as nasal in an unpleasant way. Although German is guttural, it is Spanish that they find unpleasantly guttural. Russian sounds slurred, but it is Spanish whose slurredness bothers them. It is an irrational mindset. It's worth "sharing" this with you, as Dame Edna might say, only because a sizable minority of Americans still have the Edmund/Aslan hangup about Spanish.

The Spanish language suffers from an unaddressed image problem in this country, connected to Southwestern and urban impressions of Hispanicity that sink the language and culture in the grim border zones of Texas and California and in the ghettoes and elevators of metropolises. A study on a touchy subject like this probably never has been conducted, but the Spanish-language-shunners of my acquaintance (including my Hispanic friends who intentionally choose not to understand Spanish even though it was their parents' first language)

LIESL SCHILLINGER *is writer based in New York City.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

associate the sounds of Spanish with negative qualities—not evil ones, like violence, anger or malice—but weaknesses, like laziness, passivity, poor education, anti-intellectualism, and a perverse refusal to enunciate.

It may seem counterintuitive to assert that the Spanish language has a bad reputation in this country, when you consider that, as of the last census, there were some 35 million self-described Hispanic-Americans residing here, and that projections show these numbers will only increase. The papers report that forward-looking Bobos, eying long-term demographic and employment trends, are now jousting to get their kids into Spanish-concentration magnet schools. The president sprinkles Spanish (clumsily pronounced, but he's trying) into his speeches; politicians in southern states like Texas carry on entire debates in Spanish. Of the 1.2 million American college students who studied a foreign language in 1998, more than 650,000 of them—more than half—took Spanish.

Nonetheless, several authorities on American cultural trends agree that ingrained animosity towards Spanish persists in pockets throughout this society: from the Europhiles in the upper echelons who find the language *déclassé* to the middle-classic Hispanic-Americans who want to shed their hyphenated backgrounds (or want their children to), to the struggling laborers in the lower strata who resent the growing Hispanic presence in the American workforce and see the Spanish language as the embodiment of their competition.

"This goes back to high school in the 1950s," says Joseph Epstein, lecturer in English and writing at Northwestern University and author of the new book *Snobbery: The American Version*. "In the old days, the brightest kids took Latin, the dullest kids took Spanish and women took French. If you wanted to do science or medicine, it was thought best to study German. For the rest, there was Spanish." The old, informal language channeling system has eroded, and Spanish is now popular among both male and female students. Four years ago, nearly six million of America's 13.5 million public high school students were studying Spanish. And yet, Ilan Stavans, the Lewis-Sebring Professor in Latin American and Latino Culture at Amherst College and author of *The Hispanic Condition*, firmly believes that the old prejudice lives on. "The perception of Spanish as a language of barbarians, of not fully civilized citizens, has remained with us, even though Spanish is in any college the most popular language. We still retain the impression that if you learn French or German, you're going to be closer to the heart of things Western."

Indeed, historically, Americans and Europeans alike have often skipped Spain when they considered countries responsible for the creation of Western culture. A casual scan of high culture tells the story: Nearly all the great operas still performed are sung in Italian, German, French, or English. In classical music, non-Spanish European composers predominate: Rossini, Beethoven, Chopin, Mozart, Bach. Great literature? With the single exception (and what an exception!) of Cervantes, the canon does not speak Spanish; Stendhal, Balzac, Goethe, Mann, Tolstoy, Dante, Dickens, Chaucer, and others drown it out. In art, Goya and Velázquez stand alone amid a United Nation's-worth of Frenchmen, Italians, Germans, and Dutch. Needless to say, there have been significant Spanish contributions to Western culture, even if we don't know here exactly what they were—it was probably a P.R. problem all along. But until the 20th century, the Spanish influence on Western culture was certainly under-emphasized.

Over the last 100 years, the cultural record has slowly broadened and Hispanicized—largely thanks to the oeuvre of the three Pablos—Casals, Picasso, and Neruda. Over the last four decades, the Spanish-speaking newcomers to the evolving canon have mostly come from Central and South America, which has heightened the allure of the American hemisphere's brand of Spanish. Pablo Neruda won his Nobel Prize in 1971, Gabriel Garcia Marquez won his in 1982, Octavio Paz won his in 1990. When you add to these high culture contributors the unending list of Hispanic pop culture figures who have gained prominence here since, say, Ramón Estevez became Martin Sheen, it's easy to understand why North Americans now think of Spanish as a language that is spoken south of the border, not south of the Pyrenees.

In other words, for *Norteamericanos*, Spanish now registers as a non-European language—as opposed, for example, to French. For Americans, French still evokes the country of France in a way that Spanish does not evoke Spain. The idea of Frenchness still evokes elitism, privilege, the diplomat class, savoir-faire and luxury—the gamine Gigi learning how to spot good emeralds while Maurice Chevalier warbles leeringly nearby. The idea of Spanishness has come to evoke Mexico, Puerto Rico, Jennifer Lopez, and support for the common man.

Part of this transformation has been unconscious, part has been intentional. In U.S. colleges in the '60s and afterward, an ideological divide formed between people who studied Spanish for literary and aesthetic reasons—old-schoolers—and people who supported Spanish because they opposed U.S. Latin American

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

policy (think Castro, Pinochet, the Sandinistas, Che Guevara)—new-schoolers. The old-schoolers (who sometimes liked to study French, or Greek, or Russian, or Chinese) wanted to preserve the study of languages for its own sake. The new-schoolers saw language as a political statement. The Harvard student who learned Spanish in 1975 often did so to follow Che's motorcycle route on a South American road trip. The girlfriend who accompanied him might have studied French, but she didn't want her boyfriend to think she was a snob, so she took Spanish instead. She wanted to seem like a woman of the people.

Like the girlfriend, today's politicians have found that a Spanish vocabulary is useful for disguising silver-spoon roots and expressing solidarity with the masses. Our president, George W. Bush—who comes from a famously privileged background and had a diplomat-class upbringing—demonstrated this in May at a press conference in Paris, when he scolded an American news reporter for having had the effrontery to ask President Jacques Chirac a question in French. Bush huffed to the crowd, "Very good, the guy memorizes four words, and he plays like he's intercontinental." When the reporter, stunned by the hostility, countered that he knew many more than four words of French, the president's disgust only mounted: "I'm impressed. *Que bueno* (how great)," he said snidely. He clearly meant it to sting—a not-so-veiled suggestion that the reporter was a member of the effete liberal class that was responsible for all that's wrong with American politics. At his birthday this July in Kennebunkport, Bush wore a baseball cap printed with the words "*El jefe*" (the chief). The message was clear: French is poncey, show-offy, elitist. But Spanish is all-American.

And yet, even as Bush deploys Spanish to shore up his regular-guy bona fides, a significant portion of the nation's elite still does not look forward to an America when "*Yo quiero* Taco Bell" will lisp from every television screen, and Shakira will replace Edith Piaf as soundtrack of choice for smoky cafes. Joseph Epstein discovered how strong the resistance to pro-Spanish peer pressure can be in late June, when he discussed his snobbery book on the National Public Radio call-in show "Talk of the Nation." "A woman called up who was a high school French teacher, and she seemed ticked off at the spread of Spanish," Epstein recalled. "She said she felt Spanish was being emphasized at the expense of French and that it was being emphasized in a kind of multicultural, and—oddly enough—non-Western way. She felt there was a kind of 'We must all learn Spanish now because we have so many Spanish countrymen' thing going on that had a kind of rudeness about it—whereas she felt French was a more highbrow, grander language."

Amores Perros

I can sympathize with the French teacher. As I grew older, I chose again and again not to study Spanish, preferring languages that to me seemed more exotic. The notion that the comparative ease of the Spanish language might actually recommend it for study eluded me—in the superego phase of life, what does not seem hard can seem not worth doing. When my open-minded father learned Spanish, I stopped my ears when he played his language tapes and repeated *perro* (dog) 20 times. I loved foreign languages, but didn't think Spanish counted as one. In Oklahoma, where I went to high school, many of the Hispanic kids in the high school took Spanish for an easy "A" or "B" because they already spoke it at home. "Villa Allegre" was on television, and on "Sesame Street" they taught us *abierto* and *cerrado* and *peligro*. Ads for *sazón* Goya ran alongside ads for Coca-Cola and Cottonelle. What was exotic about that?

As my education continued, I kept up the French and German, and added Russian and Italian. When I acquired friends from Puerto Rico or Mexico, they spoke to me in Spanish, and I responded in Italian or French. I wasn't a xenophobe; I traveled great distances in search of immersion in other cultures—to France, Germany, Italy, Russia, Africa, Japan—but avoided Mexico and Spain. When I went to Central America, I chose Belize, the only English-speaking country on the landmass. In New York City, where I moved after college, I assumed that the subway signs in Spanish, the Spanish newspapers, and the Spanish-speaking people around me had nothing to communicate that I couldn't ignore. Don Quixote and *A Hundred Years of Solitude* were available in translation, *Death in the Afternoon* was written in English in the first place, and I figured that would hold me. But then, like Edmund, I came around.

These days, Spanish is my favorite foreign language. The irrational mindset I once had against Spanish has been replaced by an immoderate, visceral passion for it. I love Spanish more than French, more than Russian, more than Italian (nobody *loves* German). I subscribe to the bi-weekly Spanish-language glossy women's magazine *Vanidades*, read it from cover to cover, and cook the recipes in it. Over the last two years, I have read and spoken so much Spanish that my French is now changed: I unconsciously say *y* when I mean to say *et*. The weight and rhythms of Spanish expression transport me; its physicality, drama, and lack of trumpery I find breathtaking. I just can't get enough.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Illogical as this turnaround may be, I would like to try to break it down for the diehard Edmund/Aslan/anti-*Español* contingent, to see if I can't convert them, too.

La Belle Epoque

Every time you speak another person's language, you wrap your mind around another way of contemplating the world. Language dictates perception. You can not frame what you see, or what you think, without coding it into language. For instance, in my opinion, French is a lovely, but preening language—judgmental but insincere. It is best used to spout longwinded, more-or-less empty intellectual declarations, to issue artistic judgments, or to unwrap pretty curlicues of flattery and praise. Part of the problem is that too much rhymes in French. Willy-nilly, you find yourself putting together words that sound good paired. Try to speak in French for 10 minutes without praising or criticizing something immoderately, or without saying something you don't actually mean. It can't be done. It's a language of persiflage and artifice, in which, even when you mean to build a simple cabin of words, you end up with a wedding-cakey Garnier opera.

Russian is a sentimental, even mawkish, language, richly mined with hidden menace and self-deceptions. Consider only two of Russian's aural confusions: Lubyanka, the longtime headquarters of the KGB, sounds very much like *liubyashy*, which means "loving." *Lyubit* means love, *ubit* means kill. Does Kyrill *lyubit* or *ubit* you? You might not find out in time. Also, Russians use the word Mama more frequently than probably is healthy for grown-ups. Furthermore, it's vaguely distressing the way the Russian language exaggerates and caresses dreary realities. For instance, a nice-looking woman is called a "bread-roll," *bulochka*. The language even contains a specific, affectionate term to describe the endearing (to Russians) wetness of a baby's diaper, *mokrinky*. Meanwhile, the word *mokritsy*, different only by one consonant cluster from *mokrinky*, means woodlice. You see the trouble.

Italian's rolling flow invites exaggeration—with your mouth forming o's all the time, you find yourself incessantly thinking about food, or marvelling at things. The German language's severing of verb from subject maroons you in gray, indeterminate thought, plunging you into existential worry—does anyone or anything matter? You could find out at the end of the sentence, if you could keep yourself awake—sorry, that is: if you still yourself awake keep could. And no matter what you say in German, somebody always wants to correct you.

If you have managed to absorb these capriciously drawn psychological language Rorschachs (feel free to edit and personalize them according to your own individualized takes), you can recognize that any scene or situation you might wish to describe has a separate identity that depends upon, and is constrained by, the language you use to evoke it. Each translation calls up a different scene because each language apprehends a different reality. At the moment, the Spanish reality is the one I would choose.

Today's politicians have found that a Spanish vocabulary is useful for disguising silver-spoon roots and expressing solidarity with the masses.

My *amour fou* for the Spanish language began six years ago and has been building ever since. In 1996, a friend insisted I rent a video of a Spanish bedroom farce called *Belle Epoque*. Watching the coquetterie of four sisters in a sun-dusted country house, all of them vying for the romantic attentions of one guileless young man, I finally saw that there was a Spanish culture that had nothing to do with blood, bulls, Civil War, lunch delivery, or *frijoles*. And in the sultry *susurro* (whisper) of the sisters, and in the *zarzuela* singing of their philandering mother, I finally heard that the Spanish language was suitable for romance. When the lovestruck youngest sister, Luz, lost all patience with the strapping stranger (who had bedhopped from one sister to the next, always skipping her) and finally screeched at him, "*Y yo que*?!" (And what about me?!) I was dumbfounded. What about her? What about Spanish? Why all the others and not her? Why all the other languages and not Spanish? Why indeed?

That movie started the thaw, and also coincided with the crossover of a number of Hispanic cultural phenoms on the North American scene: Ricky Martin, J. Lo, and, of course, Penelope Cruz. Soon after seeing *Belle Epoque*, I bought a copy of Pablo Neruda's *Memoirs*. Then Octavio Paz. A couple years later, when friends suggested we go to a Latino dance bar, I went

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

willingly. It was there I received the turbo-boost to this thawing, which, predictably, came in the form of a South American boyfriend, the scion of a family of plantation owners, who rode horses, surfed, did something in finance, read Noam Chomsky, instructed me to thank the *Señor* (God) every day for the joy of being alive, and told me, without any anxiety (at my prompting) that, on the whole, he thought it would be prettier if I grew my nails and had long blond hair, but he didn't mind if I didn't feel like it. He called me every endearment in the *diccionario* and looked like Beastmaster, so I indulged him. His clarity, directness and warmth came to symbolize for me the qualities of the Spanish language. So many other languages are good for dissembling; Spanish is good for revealing.

Because of this boyfriend, who was far too laissez-faire to bother teaching me, I began to learn Spanish by reading my favorite novels in Spanish translation: Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*, Balzac's *Père Goriot*. I started out speaking Italian to my boyfriend, sprinkling in words and verbs that I thought were Spanish; but as I read and learned further, I began to integrate the Spanish from my reading into my speaking. I would memorize and recite entire phrases from *El Revés de la Trama* (*The Heart of the Matter*) and try them out for sheer drama. "*Ya creía que habíamos terminado con eso*," I would say gravely ("I thought we had finished with that"). It was so firm. Kind of harsh, but so real, and playful under it all. The boyfriend would laugh at me. Before long, I was speaking in Spanish, period, though none too correctly, and my Italian was gone.

The best side effect hit me on the New York City streets. I felt like a child who had read a favorite book over and over, not realizing it was pop-up. Everywhere I went, a parallel New York seemed to emerge from the streets I already knew; in bars, libraries, bodegas, clubs, parks, swimming pools, a second conversation had been going on all along, all the years I'd lived here, only I hadn't heard it. I began to notice the difference in cadence and speed and intent between Puerto Rican Spanish, Madrileño Spanish, Argentine, Chilean, Mexican, Dominican. There was so much to learn and absorb. Once when the boyfriend and I were chatting, sitting on a picnic blanket in a park in Brooklyn, a man at the next blanket over, sitting with his kids and his dog, leaned over to joke with us because his dog was sprawled on its back on the grass, paws in the air, with a ridiculous expression on its face. "*El perro está muy cansado* ..." the man said jokily. "The dog is exhausted." The television acquired new channels—Spanish news, dubbed movies, bizarre variety shows. I never learned the future tense in Spanish, but my boyfriend said that was sensible, because he would be leaving soon. *Novio*, the word for boyfriend, also meant fiancé –how usefully sneaky! I found a word, *deslizarse*, which means to slip out of some entanglement—"like a lizard" was my mnemonic. The word enchanted me. The whole Spanish vocabulary seemed runic, like incantations—*disfrutar*, to enjoy, evoked ripe fruit; *malapalabra*—bad word—sounded like a magic spell. *Caderas* meant "hips" and sounded triumphant, and sturdy and profemininity. *Salpimentar* meant to salt-and-pepper something. Joy, food, bodies, spiciness, undercurrents, movement, efficiency, acceptance.

After the boyfriend moved, I discovered the defiant ballads of the Peruvian pop star Shakira. Her song, "*Ciega Sordomuda*"—"Blind, Deaf and Dumb"—which sounds like an Alanis anthem sung by Linda Ronstadt— intoxicated me: "*Bruta, ciega , sordomuda, torpe, traste, testaruda; es todo lo que he sido, por ti me he convertido en una cosa que no hace otra cosa mas que amarte...*" ("Ugly, blind, deaf and dumb, torpid, worthless, stubborn—that's all I've been since you turned me into something that can do nothing but love you.") The strength in admitting weakness amazed me. She was so abject, but so cheeky—unafraid of pain. Not sentimental or dippy like an American or French lovesong—passionate, a little crazy, and vaguely threatening. When I try to convince my Spanish-resistant friends of the virtues of *Vanidades* or Shakira, I meet with limited success. But what they think doesn't matter. No lesser an authority than Paul Fussell, author of the Bible of the American caste system, *Class*, told me, "I believe quite sincerely that in 50 years Spanish will be the absolute equal of English as a social and financial and serious alternative to English in this country. America will be bilingual, absolutely. The bright people will be." My fervent hope is that, despite my newfound love of Spanish, the bright people will be trilingual—English, Spanish, and something else, too.

Last summer I went to Spain, but I made the mistake of going with a British friend who is still caught in the grip of the Edmund/Aslan anti-*Español* spell. Tapas distressed her; sangria struck her as "naff." And when, at two in the morning at a disco in Alicante, we found ourselves talking to the son of a bullfighter and his entourage—she finally took me aside and exploded, "WHY must we keep talking to all these ... Spanish people!" I looked at her sympathetically, remembering what it had been like. "Because, we are in Spain," I responded. What else could I say? One day, like Edmund and Aslan, she'll come around. She will have to do it on her own. It will be gradual, but once it starts, it won't stop. And I say ... *arriba*.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Reality Bites

Why He-Man, Care Bears, and Miami Vice are making a comeback.

BY COURTNEY RUBIN

FOR THREE DAYS EACH JUNE, NEW York's cavernous Jacob Javits Convention Center becomes ground zero for an annual confab known as the Licensing Show, in which several hundred food, film, and toy companies convene in an orgy of T-shirts, dolls, trinkets, and practically anything else that can be licensed, franchised, marketed, or sold. Between the crowds and the costumed characters (Big Bird, Mickey and Minnie) prowling the aisles, the show is like Disney World for marketers and retailers. It also has more than a touch of Tomorrowland: It's the place to go for a preview of pop culture.

Yet there was something oddly familiar about this year's offerings: Hasbro trotted out a Godzilla-sized Tonka Truck; Mattel reintroduced Hot Wheels cars; and the Cartoon Network touted its $20-million resurrection of the '80s cartoon smash "He-Man and the Masters of the Universe," along with 25 new He-Man toys aimed to coincide with the cartoon's comeback. Fox Broadcasting plugged upcoming revitalizations of such dubious 1980s fare as the Cabbage Patch Kids and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, while Yogi Bear, the Jetsons, Strawberry Shortcake, and the treacly Care Bears were ubiquitous on T-shirts.

Elsewhere, the story is similar. In August, *People* magazine paid homage to '80s country-club chic, showing photos of Matthew Broderick and Natalie Portman in Lacoste shirts. *People*'s sibling *In Style* breathlessly reported that Kate Hudson was snapping up '80s inspired guitar pick earrings, which feature song titles such as "Lucky Star" and "Call Me" imprinted on hideously mismatching bright pink and orange picks.

COURTNEY RUBIN *is a senior writer at* Washingtonian.

Television airwaves are also returning to the '80s: NBC's "The '80s Show" vies with Nick at Nite's "Three's Company," and "Facts of Life" (and coming soon, "Family Ties" and "Cheers"). Movies in the works for 2003 and beyond include Ang Lee's remake of "The Incredible Hulk," plus big-screen versions of "Starsky and Hutch," "Hogan's Heroes," "I Dream of Jeannie," and even that '80s stalwart, "Miami Vice." A poster on display at the Javits Center that displayed the hirsute former sitcom star A.L.F. (currently enjoying an unlikely comeback alongside fellow '80s relic Mr. T in television ads for 1-800-Collect) neatly captured the prevailing ethos: "Retro is in. Just stick with me, boys—this Spider-Man thing is just a phase." Indeed, retro—Generation X retro, specifically—is back. For what was most notable about this year's glimpse of the future is how much it looked like the past.

Chances are if you're already intimately familiar with these figures—if your Christmas list once included Cabbage Patch Kids, if you idled away your pre-adolescent afternoons watching "He-Man" and "Starsky and Hutch" reruns, if there was ever a time in which you unselfconsciously wore Izod shirts— you came of age in the 1980s. And chances are if any of the above elicited pangs of nostalgia, you, like me, are a member of Generation X—one of the 46 million Americans born between 1965 and 1978. (Or, if you prefer, anyone too young to remember the Kennedy assassination and too old to have had a cell phone in college.) For a few brief years, before the dot-com boom eclipsed them, Gen Xers were a staple of nationwide media coverage, known chiefly for their irony, ennui, and general self-loathing. That and their visceral hatred for the self-absorbed, self-important Baby Boom generation that preceded them.

So it's more than a little, er, ironic that a generation

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

unified by its disgust with the Baby Boomers' nauseating glorification of its youth culture should now be wallowing in its own. But after scanning the Licensing Show lineup of what will soon constitute pop culture's next big things, one can't help but notice a curious difference: Unlike earlier strains of generational nostalgia, Generation X chooses to celebrate not the best of its youth, but the worst.

Unlike earlier strains of nostalgia, Generation X celebrates not the best of its youth, but the worst.

Scooby Doo-Doo

Why the sudden revival of the sort of schlocky '80s culture best left in the attic—or the dumpster? Like many trends, this one is driven in part by Hollywood's marketing groupthink. If *Charlie's Angels* hit it big at the box office two years ago, it must follow that America is starving for big-screen versions of "Scooby Doo" and "Starsky and Hutch." And now that Xers are hitting the age when they're able to call the shots at movie and television studios, they want to mark their own territory—and it doesn't hurt to do it in ways that stick it to their elders. On Nick at Nite, the all-reruns-all-the-time cable channel launched 15 years ago as a way to milk Boomer nostalgia, "The Dick Van Dyke Show" and "Mary Tyler Moore" have been shunted to TV's equivalent of a nursing home: the TV Land channel. After all, Nick at Nite had to make room for '80s vintage cornball shows like "Three's Company" and "The Facts of Life."

Xers are also having kids, and movies like the new *Scooby Doo* are calculated to appeal to the whole family: Xer parents can reminisce about the many episodes in which some haggard old villain nabbed by the gang grumbled about "you meddling kids," while their kids are kept happy with that age-old preteen pleaser: flatulence jokes. The same fun-for-the-whole-family ploy is at work in Old Navy's fall ad campaign. A takeoff on the "Brady Bunch," complete with theme song, the ads lure media-savvy Gen X moms and dads into the stores—"It's a Sunshine Day" playing in an endless loop—to buy Old Navy rugby shirts for their kids. (It doesn't hurt that Xers are also the ones who can spot '80s icon Morgan Fairchild as Mrs. Brady in the commercial, which makes us feel in on the joke.)

Another explanation for the explosion of Gen X touchstones, *The New York Times* recently noted, is that Hollywood these days is longer on inventory than creativity. It's cheaper and easier for studios to reissue or repackage brands they already own the rights to, such as "Transformers" and "The Partridge Family," than to risk trying something new. Finally, there's the axiom of modern life that everyone reaches an age at which they feel the need to revisit the culture of their youth. Believe it or not, the oldest Xers are already pushing 40.

What is completely different about Generation X nostalgia, though, is that it's the first without pretense that what it's fetishizing was really all that great to begin with. Consider its predecessors. "Greatest Generation" nostalgia is all about celebrating real achievement (fighting World War II) and timeless music (swing). Those who came of age in the 1950s are honestly wistful for the innocent pleasures of Perry Como, Chubby Checker, and sock hops. And, of course, Baby Boomers take inordinate pride in the acid-laced youth culture they experienced (the Beatles, the Stones, Hendrix) and social movements they took part in (civil rights, anti-war, feminism).

The '80s generation, by contrast, seems to pride itself on wallowing in the worst that decade has to offer. NBC recently debuted "The Rerun Show," in which an eight-member troupe reenacts episodes of campy old sitcoms in a way that's part love-in, part lampoon, turning familiar characters into punch lines. In a "The Facts of Life" skit, the overweight Natalie eats to the point of breaking furniture, while the nauseatingly bubbly Tootie now bounces like a bobble-head doll. A "Diff'rent Strokes" sendup paints beneficent millionaire Mr. Drummond as a pedophile. Over at VH1, pioneer of the hour-long documentary about rock stars' hackneyed descents into drugs and alcohol, the chase for the Gen X audience is on. A new show called "Ultimate Albums" chronicles the "creativity and clashes, hassles and headaches" of such dubious '80s classics as Def Leppard and Bon Jovi. Even current bands can get in on the '80s racket: Alien Ant Farm made its reputation (and a platinum record) largely on the strength of remaking the 1988 Michael Jackson hit "Smooth Criminal," their video for which gleefully parodies every moon-walking, crotch-grabbing, embarrassing '80s excess.

Surviving Wham!

This tendency to focus on the worst culture of our youth is well in keeping with the characteristics that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

defined Generation X in the first place. Most who grew up during the '80s remember life during that decade as unremittingly awful, and not without considerable justification. Ronald Reagan was president. Good jobs were scarce. Crime, AIDS, and homelessness all were on the rise. The specter of *Day After*-style nuclear annihilation was drummed into students' heads. And much of pop culture was indeed really, truly awful. Perhaps worst of all, we were forever cursed to follow in the wake of the most obnoxious, self-congratulatory generation in generations. As a character in author and Gen X-patron saint Douglas Coupland's 1989 novel *Generation X* put it to his Boomer boss, "Do you really think we enjoy hearing about your brand-new million-dollar home when we can barely afford to eat Kraft Dinner sandwiches in our own grimy little shoe boxes and we're pushing 30? A home you won in a genetic lottery, I might add, sheerly by dint of your having been born in the right time in history. And I have to endure pinheads like you rusting above me for the rest of my life, always grabbing the best piece of cake first and then putting a barbed-wire fence around the rest. You really make me sick."

In the face of "Boomer envy" and the numerous other indignities we suffered, the coping mechanism most of us adopted (and which Coupland so brilliantly chronicled) was keeping an ironic distance and never appearing to take anything very seriously—after all, when pop culture stipulated legwarmers, hairspray, and Wham!, it was the only viable way to maintain our dignity. Today's Generation X nostalgia approaches the past in much the same way: as one big, silly, insider joke.

Enduring Irony

The current '80s crop of cartoon favorites, sitcom has-beens, embarrassing pop relics, and fashion offenses takes what was essentially kitsch to begin with and parodies it. Instead of straightforward reruns and revivals, our nostalgia is, at root, ironic.

By the second day of the Licensing Show, in response to the poster of A.L.F. needling Spider-Man, Marvel Comics (which, of course, had a booth) came up with a pitch-perfect rejoinder, hoisting its own poster of the Incredible Hulk choking the furry alien and shouting, "A.L.F. makes me angry!"

At its best, Gen X nostalgia can produce pop culture that's actually pretty enjoyable. The Cartoon Network has scored a hit with its new late-night show geared toward adults, "Harvey Birdman, Attorney at Law," which takes an obscure Hanna-Barbera superhero and cleverly recasts him as a lawyer fighting for the rights of animated characters. His clients include Shaggy and Scooby Doo, Fred Flintstone, and Yogi Bear and Boo Boo; and plotlines address such timeless Gen X debates as whether or not Scooby and Shaggy were constantly stoned.

But more often, a campy celebration of schlock is just plain camp—or worse, just plain terrible. Last March, VH1 debuted the game show "Never Mind the Buzzcocks," which featured musical parlor games that included a sorry segment in which Reagan-era has-beens like Tiffany and Joey McIntyre picked out equally pathetic fellow has-beens (Mike Reno from Loverboy) from a lineup of impersonators. Mercifully, the show was cancelled after a month.

The most irritating trait of generational nostalgia is its selectivity, its remembrance of only that which fits a generation's self-image. Those who pine for the simplicity of "Happy Days" and their '50s adolescence don't like to be reminded of McCarthyism or segregation. Privileged Boomers prefer not to dwell on the fact that they spent their parents' money to trash their parents' values. Gen X nostalgia is also selective, but in just the opposite way: We don't cherish the best, but the worst, employing the same arm's-length irony that saw us through the Reagan years, recessions, and the coke-snorting, yuppified, *Bonfire of the Vanities* excesses that never seemed to trickle down to us. So instead, we do now as we did then, hewing to what is comfortable. But doing so requires that we ignore what actually merits remembering about the culture of our youth, limited though it may be: the good music (The Replacements, R.E.M., and a less self-aware U2), the worth-another-viewing movies and television (*Platoon*, "Moonlighting"), and the transformative events we witnessed (the fall of the Berlin Wall). Let's skip the 101-ism (Coupland's neologism for self-analysis based on half-understood undergraduate psychology). The joke may be on us. But true to form, at least we're in on it. ●

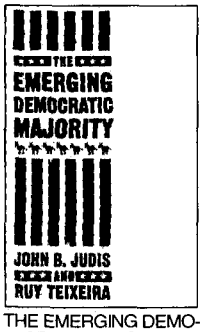
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Party Hardy

Most Americans agree with Democrats. But will they vote for them?

BY KENNETH S. BAER

IN 1974, LANNY DAVIS—WHO WOULD ONE day be a White House special counsel in the Clinton administration, but at the time was a young New Left Democratic activist—wrote a book entitled *The Emerging Democratic Majority*. Surveying the wreckage of George McGovern's campaign against Richard Nixon two years earlier, Davis argued that the future of American politics lay in a Democratic majority built around the failed McGovern coalition—college-educated middle-class professionals and minorities, plus the white working class. At the nadir of McGovern's defeat, Davis believed, could be found the path to future Democratic dominance.



THE EMERGING DEMOCRATIC MAJORITY: *by John B. Judis and Ruy Teixeira*
Scribner, $24.00

Twenty-eight years later, John B. Judis and Ruy Teixeira have published a new book with the same title arguing, essentially, the same thing. In their version of *The Emerging Democratic Majority*, the authors argue that since 1992, American politics has been in transition from an old order of Republican dominance—which began with Richard Nixon's election in 1968 and culminated in Ronald Reagan's in 1980—to an emerging Democratic majority built around professionals, non-whites, women, and the white working class. Their home is familiar to anyone who watched the presidential returns in 2000: the "blue" states of the Northeast, West Coast, and upper Midwest. But in contrast to the New Left liberalism of the McGoverniks, their politics is what Judis and Teixeira call "progressive centrism." The emerging Democratic majority supports a strong social safety net, yet retains a healthy respect for the free market, fiscal discipline, and incremental change. They favor an enabling, not mandating, federal government. They are tolerant of "alternative lifestyles" and embrace minorities, yet are opposed to quotas and reparations. They don't belong to McGovern's Democratic Party, or even Hubert Humphrey's, but to Bill Clinton's. And no matter what grand plans Karl Rove has for the GOP, it is Clinton's Democratic Party that will dominate the next political era. In other words, Judis and Teixeira argue, Lanny Davis was right—just 30 years too early.

Having followed both Judis's and Teixeira's work over the past decade, I picked up this book expecting another ideological salvo in the on-going factional wars within the Democratic Party. Teixeira and Judis have usually been aligned with labor-liberal intellectuals such as Jeff Faux, Stanley Greenberg, and Robert Kuttner, all of whom bemoaned Clinton's courting of suburbanites at the expense of the white working class and criticized his administration's fidelity to an agenda of fiscal discipline and leaner government at the expense of large social projects such as national health care.

But Judis and Teixeira seem to have undergone a conversion on the road to a Democratic majority. They have delivered a balanced, accessible volume that offers

KENNETH S. BAER, *author of* REINVENTING DEMOCRATS: THE POLITICS OF LIBERALISM FROM REAGAN TO CLINTON, *was deputy director of speechwriting for Gore-Lieberman 2000.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a well-reasoned and well-supported analysis. While the root of their argument is not entirely novel—it's been a staple of New Democratic thinking since the mid-1990s—Judis and Teixeira move the discussion forward as much through the new data, fresh arguments, and useful critiques of both sides as by the fact that it is they who are providing them. Put simply, after eight years of Clinton, the programmatic differences between most New and Old Democrats are not that vast. And with this growing consensus comes the potential for Democratic dominance as demographic and cultural trends move the electorate toward a Democratic Party that has not only moved toward them, but also may be prepared for their arrival.

But before Democrats cue up "Happy Days Are Here Again," they'll have to grapple with that part of the McGovern legacy which Judis and Teixeira virtually ignore: the party's fractiousness. Putting these disparate social groups into a coalition is no easy task. Indeed, when it comes to putting ideas into action—recruiting candidates, crafting a message, targeting voters, allocating party resources—the gulf between Old and New Democrats is still wide. The challenge for Democrats, then, is no longer getting the party to tack to the winds of change, but to get everyone rowing in the same direction.

The old rift between Old and New Democrats is no longer vast. But so far, Bill Clinton has been the only politician to bridge it.

Professional Class Warfare

The Emerging Democratic Majority is meant to be the 21st century's answer to Kevin Phillips's 1969 book, *The Emerging Republican Majority*, which argued that socially conservative whites were disenchanted with the Democratic Party, creating an electoral opportunity for Nixon and the GOP. Judis and Teixeira hold that America is undergoing an equally profound realignment that, this time around, favors Democrats. The old industrial economy is giving way to a post-industrial one centered on producing ideas and services rather than goods. In this New Economy, there is a growing group of "professionals"—not quite executives and managers, but not the blue-collar workers producing the goods or the entry-level employees serving them, either. This "creative class" includes engineers, scientists, designers, architects, lawyers, teachers, and social workers. And it's a group that is highly educated, diverse, and—most importantly—was once solidly Republican.

Yet as their ranks have swelled by almost one-third in the 1990s (they now comprise 21 percent of the voting electorate), professionals have come in contact with and been frustrated by authorities in both the private and public sector, forcing them to cede their own standards of quality to market imperatives. (Think of how much doctors hate HMOs, and one can grasp why professionals may no longer feel fidelity to the party of laissez-faire capitalism.) An increasing number of professionals, like teachers, have joined unions, further pushing the group as a whole toward the Democratic Party while transforming the labor movement into one dominated less and less by old-style industrial trades. And by contrast with their GOP forbearers, many professionals were influenced by the environmental and consumer-rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s. If Democrats can harness the new professionals as Nixon did disaffect working-class whites, argue Judis and Teixeira, they stand to become "the party of the transition from urban industrialism to a new post-industrial metropolitan order in which men and women play equal roles and in which white America is supplanted by multi-racial, multiethnic America."

Judis and Teixeira make two important points. First, America's values have changed since the 1960s. While most Americans were not personally radicalized on college campuses, they were nonetheless affected by the social upheavals of the '60s and '70s. Thirty years later, the passions of the cultural wars have cooled, and what is left is not conservatism but a broad tolerance for individuals' private choices. Second, the workforce has changed remarkably. Unionized professionals are not voting Democratic because they are professionals, but because they are unionized (and, increasingly, unionized government employees at that). Yet Judis and Teixeira's premise is correct: A party organized around industrial workers is as out of place in the 21st century as one organized around free silver. This insight into the transformation of the workforce is not particularly new. New Democrats have been arguing this since the mid-1990s. Yet Judis and Teixeira make a valuable contribution to it

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

by doing the legwork in the census data to offer a more persuasive and powerful way of looking at these post-industrial workers. Unlike the "wired workers" touted by New Democrats, Judis and Teixeira's term "professionals" distinguishes the educated workers more open to a Democratic message from the more traditional—and solidly Republican—managers and executives.

The single biggest obstacle to the emerging Democratic majority is not so much policy as politics—pulling that majority together to win at the voting booth.

Meanwhile, as professionals became more Democratic, women entered the workforce and moved into the Democratic camp, bolstering the diminishing loyalty of the white working class. Non-whites—Asians, African-Americans, and Latinos—are almost entirely in the Democratic camp, and with their prospects for growth, Judis and Teixeira see a huge upside for their party.

But politics is about more than just numbers. It's about addresses, too. And as Democrats learned in 2000, how many votes a candidate gets isn't all that's important—it matters where they come from. Where are these elusive voters to be found? Most analysts look at the data and answer with one word: suburbia. But with more than half of Americans living in the suburbs, this answer offers little specificity. Either we need a new question or we need a new answer.

Judis and Teixeira opt for the latter, writing that the new Democratic majority lives in the "ideopolises" of post-industrial America —the metropolitan areas that include suburbs and cities in which ideas and services predominate, and where manufacturing centers on the kind "that applies complex ideas to physical objects," like pharmaceuticals or software. These areas are chock full of professionals, with minorities filling the low-level service jobs, and both groups are united by a shared urbanity. Ideopolises range from Wisconsin's Dane County (home of Madison) to Washington's King County (Seattle) to Silicon Valley to Chicago and its formerly Republican collar counties.

While Republicans, as Karl Rove and conservative journalist Michael Barone contend, have an advantage in "the fastest-growing parts of the United States," Judis and Teixeira rightly point out that this statistic is not the one that matters. After all, some of the smallest, most rural counties are also the fastest growing (such as Boise County, Idaho, which jumped from 3,500 to 6,700 people in 10 years). What counts, say Judis and Teixeira, are the counties that have the most absolute population growth, and in these counties— such as Arizona's Maricopa County and Nevada's Clark County—Democrats are starting to dominate. In addition, as once-rural Republican counties like California's San Bernardino become part of the ideopolis, they, too, will begin to turn Democratic. The national map may look like a red sea of Republicans, but according to Judis and Teixeira's calculations, ideopolises have 43.7 percent of the national vote, and are growing at an astronomical rate—23.2 percent over the 1990s. This is driving the blue states ever bluer and pushing marginal Bush states, such as Florida, New Hampshire, and Ohio, into the Democratic majority.

Oxford-educated Bubbas

Crucially, the Democrats have changed, too—that is, moved themselves toward the emerging majority as that majority has moved itself towards them. Beginning in the mid-1980s with the rise of the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) and the New Democrats, the Democratic Party began to shed its baggage as a party that could not be trusted to spend taxpayer dollars responsibly (which is important to fiscally conservative professionals) or to stand up for mainstream cultural values (which is important to the white working class). During the Clinton years, the Democratic Party—in Judis and Teixeira's approving words—offered a "moderate accommodation" to the "radical movements" of both the left and right.

The very fact that the authors would make such an evaluation subtly underscores another important change: The rift between Old and New Democrats is not so vast as it once was. Specifically, there is very little programmatic difference between the two factions. Very few Old Democrats call for the repeal of welfare reform, propose massive new governmental entitlements, or go five minutes without extolling the virtues of family. Even among African-American

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

voters, the old politics of grievance is sputtering, as reflected by the primary defeats of Reps. Cynthia McKinney (D-Ga.) and Earl Hilliard (D-Ala.)—each by a more moderate black candidate—and the emergence of Ron Kirk as a viable Senate candidate in Texas. On the other side, very few New Democrats are calling for the privatization of Social Security or the passage of trade agreements without ample concessions to help displaced workers. When it comes to crafting legislation and passing it into law, a "progressive centrism" has indeed emerged.

One reason is that New Democratic policies worked. The Clinton record on reducing crime, reforming welfare, eliminating the deficit, expanding educational opportunity, and growing the economy speaks for itself—but it also spoke to voters, helping re-elect the first Democrat to a second full term in the White House since 1936. Another reason is that, just as a surging surplus began to stir the Old Democratic passion for big government programs—and the GOP's for massive tax cuts—Bill Clinton dedicated it to "save Social Security first." By placing fiscal discipline in defense of a valued entitlement, he solidified liberal support for his fiscal conservatism.

Finally, many New Democrats—especially those re-elected in the competitive swing districts of Judis and Teixeira's ideopolises—began to realize that they needed Old Democrats, too. Intellectually, they stepped back from exploring school vouchers and abandoned entitlement reform, reacquainting themselves with the unique ability of the federal government to provide a basic safety net. Electorally, they came to see that the Democratic base—activists, union members, and blacks—were essential foot soldiers for Democratic candidates.

But, while this convergence has produced legislative coalitions, it has not necessarily translated into a robust political coalition. Indeed, the single biggest obstacle to the emerging Democratic majority is not so much policy as politics—pulling that majority together to win at the voting booth. Does a Democratic candidate stress environmentalism, gun control, and abortion rights to win professionals or downplay them to win Reagan Democrats? Does a candidate support putting the brakes on free-trade agreements to win over manufacturing workers in the Mahoning Valley or opening markets to win over tech workers in Silicon Valley? And to win minority voters, can a candidate appeal to African Americans and Asian and Latino immigrants at the same time with the same message? How you answer these questions reflects not just the intellectual question of where you line up along the Democratic Party's factional divide, but the practical questions of which message to use, what voters to target, and what programs to place at the top of your agenda.

This divide is what animates the current debate over whether Al Gore's "people versus the powerful" approach was ever powerful enough. Old Democrats, such as Gore pollster Stan Greenberg, argue that had Gore adhered to it more closely, and not had to contend with the fatigue of Clinton scandal, his positioning would have worked. To New Democrats, such as Al From and Mark Penn (also a Gore pollster), this populist appeal never stood a chance, as it was fundamentally out-of-step with the times, alienating the optimistic professionals of the ideolopises.

The data on all of this is as fuzzy as the election results. Nevertheless, the endurance of this debate highlights the fragility of the Democratic coalition that Judis and Teixeira envision. So far, Bill Clinton—an Oxford-educated Bubba who once worked for McGovern and later chaired the DLC—has been the only politician to bridge the divide. By campaigning as a self-described "middle-class moderate offering radical change," Clinton was able to defeat Paul Tsongas by running left to the Democratic base and defeat George H.W. Bush by returning to the center. More importantly, he was able to do this dance by "putting people first" in a way that stressed common obligations over social divisions—that offered hope, not rage. Simply put, Clinton was the hybrid New Democrat-populist.

Considering Clinton's unparalleled political talents and the party unity born of three consecutive presidential defeats, Democratic successes in the '90s may not be the beginning of a new political era at all. Might Clinton have been to a Republican era what Eisenhower once was to a Democratic one: an aberration? The answer to that question will expose the ultimate value of Judis and Teixeira's analysis of the future of American politics—something that will take an election or two to emerge. Still, the Democratic Party is far better situated than it was in 1972. Despite the continued dominance of the institutional party by Old Democrats far to the left of the general electorate and a noticeable resurgence of old perceptions of the party (weak on defense, soft on crime, untrustworthy on taxes), the party is at parity with the GOP. Looking forward, it may not take a generation for Judis and Teixeira's Democratic majority to emerge, but the party still awaits a roadmap—and a guide. ●

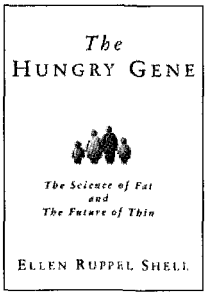
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Why We Eat

The science of obesity.

By Stephanie Mencimer

TWO YEARS AGO, A YOUNG ORGAN transplant doctor told me a harrowing story. Recently he had stood by and watched helplessly as a 15-year-old African-American girl died from an enlarged heart. A transplant might have saved her, but high blood pressure, diabetes, and a body mass of more than 400 pounds made surgery impossible. The memory haunted him as he continued to treat more and more children experiencing the deadly effects of chronic obesity. Mostly poor black kids, they marched through his office suffering from high cholesterol, high blood pressure, enlarged hearts, and adult-onset diabetes that promised to fill their future with kidney failure, amputations, blindness, and early heart attacks and strokes.



THE HUNGRY GENE:
The Science of Fat and the Future of Thin
by Ellen Ruppel Shell
Atlantic Monthly Press, $25.00

Despite the staggering numbers of kids like this who were showing up in District doctors' offices, little was being done about it. The public schools had long since sacrificed physical education to budget cuts; understaffed cafeterias served students Domino's pizza to be washed down with 20-ounce bottles of Powerade from school vending machines. The American Diabetes Association, headquartered in nearby Alexandria, Va., did not have a single program in the District for adults, much less children. Even as the casualties mounted, no one was sounding the alarm about all these fat kids. Eventually, though, I discovered that one group of people had taken a keen interest in the local obesity epidemic: drug company researchers. D.C. had so many fat kids, most of whom also had fat parents, that it was a veritable gold mine for gene-hunters looking for new drugs to treat Type 2 diabetes and obesity.

I thought about these kids—and the scientists pursuing them—as I read Ellen Ruppel Shell's new book, *The Hungry Gene*. As the co-director of the science journalism program at Boston University, Shell's specialty is scientists, and her book is largely a story about them. Her characters run the gamut from geneticists to nutritionists studying indigenous people of Micronesia, where a traditional diet of fish and breadfruit has been replaced by, of all things, Spam. The sum of all their tales isn't particularly heartening for those who may be carrying around a few extra pounds.

As Shell explains, humans are hardwired to get fat. Put us within arm's reach of too much junk food, liberate us from manual labor, and very few will avoid gaining a spare tire. "Obesity represents a triumph of instinct over reason, and as such it embarrasses us," writes Shell. "We prefer to think of ourselves as rational beings, in firm control of our destinies or, at the very least, of our bodies. But the deciphering of the genetic underpinnings to weight regulation has ascertained that it is to some degree biological, and that our drive to eat can sometimes eclipse reason."

The difficulty of overcoming genetic imperatives, though, hasn't prevented the nation from devoting its tremendous scientific resources to finding a pharmaceutical cure for excess poundage. While Shell strives for balance, it's clear that she doesn't think too highly of some of the scientists leading the race to find an obesity drug. Some of those who specialize in the study of

Stephanie Mencimer *is an editor of* The Washington Monthly.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gluttony also seem to suffer from another deadly sin: greed. Foremost among them, according to Shell, is Jeffrey Friedman, the head of the Laboratory of Molecular Genetics at Rockefeller University, who eventually helped discover—and patent—the first obesity gene, ob, and the protein it expressed, called leptin. Researchers believe that leptin is the body's tool for regulating appetite, alerting the brain when enough food has been consumed, and have entertained high hopes that someday it could be used as an appetite suppressant in humans.

In getting the gene patent, according to Shell, Friedman screwed over the very people who had helped him make the discovery in the first place, including veterans in the field whose preeminence helped secure the funding for his experiments and lab assistants who had devoted their lives to the cause and labored in horrible conditions for years. Shell says Friedman conveniently took over one assistant's nearly finished experiments while she was out of town, just before the big discovery, thus ensuring that he would be the only one credited with finding the gene. Friedman had also ensconced himself on the scientific advisory board of a drug company, anticipating a windfall from any drugs produced as a result of the discovery of leptin.

Among the many people Friedman denied credit for the achievement was Doug Coleman, who had done the pioneering work on obesity in mice in the '70s, and who had advised Friedman on his work. "Science was once about the free exchange of ideas, about collaboration," Coleman told Shell bitterly. "But today it's about intellectual property and confidentiality. It's all about patents, about ownership."

Another of Shell's targets is George Bray, a professor of medicine at Louisiana State University Medical Center, an esteemed scientist, past president of the International Association for the Study of Obesity, and founding editor of both the *International Journal of Obesity* and *Obesity Research*. He's also a guy who thinks that obesity is so dangerous that half the country should be taking diet drugs. As a result, his services have been sought out by various drug companies seeking to promote, or to protect from regulation, highly dubious weight-loss products. According to Shell, Bray has pimped fen-phen, Merida, and Metabolife's dietary supplements containing ephedra, an herb that works much like amphetamine and has been linked to the deaths of more than 100 people.

Not all the scientists in the book are portrayed as scoundrels. Shell finds several who got into the obesity field because they were genuinely interested in helping overweight people. One of them is Stephen O'Rahilly, a professor of metabolic medicine at the University of Cambridge, a doctor who actually likes treating patients and specializes in hard cases. A few years back, he treated a pair of cousins from Pakistan who suffered from what could only be called a pathological case of gluttony. The eight-year-old girl weighed nearly 190 pounds, and, despite liposuction and surgery, could no longer walk. The two-year-old, who weighed 65 pounds, was heading down the same path. The children behaved like "starving explorers," reports Shell, devouring everything in sight. If their parents padlocked the pantry at night, the kids would scavenge "through the trash for soggy French fries and gnawed frozen fish sticks from the freezer. There was no stopping them."

Dozens of doctors had tried to help, but they could find no explanation for such behavior. So the kids went to see O'Rahilly. He was aware of Friedman's work on the effects of leptin deficiency in mice, but scientists had never been able to find a leptin deficiency in humans. (In fact, most fat people have an overabundance of the stuff.) But O'Rahilly located it in the cousins and eventually also found the obesity gene mutation—the first such discovery in humans—which was telling the cousins' brains that they were starving. In an unprecedented experiment, O'Rahilly injected the cousins with leptin, with almost instantaneous results. The cousins stopped their nightly foraging in the kitchen, pushed away from the table, and shed pound after pound. O'Rahilly's work proved conclusively that the drive to overeat had deep genetic roots.

While leptin may have cured the Punjabi cousins of their ruinous cravings, its usefulness in treating other overweight people has so far been limited only to those with the specific, and rare, genetic mutation. More recent studies have shown that leptin does not serve as the body's tool for maintaining slimness, but rather prevents the body from becoming too thin. It's protective—if you're a hunter-gatherer subject to great variations in the availability of food. That's why, as one researcher told Shell, "For one or two months people considered leptin the Great White Hope. But we now know that leptin is not very good at preventing people from eating too much."

Forever Fat

With more than 60 percent of Americans overweight, Shell says scientists and drug companies alike see obesity as the "trillion-dollar disease," which is why, even when their products have failed to deliver,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

they have resorted to devious and underhanded schemes to deceive people into taking them anyway. Diet drugs have proven notoriously ineffective at helping people lose weight, and also usually rather dangerous. Fen-phen, which caused hundreds of cases of deadly primary pulmonary hypertension and heart-valve damage, is but one example. Shell shows how drug companies manipulated the Food and Drug Administration to get approval for Meridia, a weight loss drug that raises the risk of high blood pressure and stroke—the very things that are supposed to be reduced by losing weight. Meridia now has been linked to at least 19 deaths. And she finds several examples of prominent doctors selling drug companies the use of their names in order to get misleading industry-written articles touting the benefits of drugs like fen-phen into peer-reviewed medical journals.

Not only does Shell hold out these stories as morality tales about the dangers of greed in science, but she also uses the diet drug failures to make a convincing case that the scientific intellect will probably never outsmart the hardwiring of the body to consume excessive calories. Treat one angle of the problem, and another will kick in to compensate for it. That's why something drastic such as gastric bypass surgery—stomach stapling—works, but only for a while. Eventually, people who've undergone the surgery regain their appetites, and find creative ways to circumvent the problem of the smaller stomach, such as drinking melted quarts of ice cream. "Mother Nature wants her children to eat. Knock out a satiety gene like *ob* and an animal will eat insatiably. But knock out an appetite gene, and animals continue to eat normally," Shell writes. "For this reason, appetite-controlling drugs like fen-phen and Meridia, while they may work for some for a year or two, are not likely to permanently alter the eating habits of millions."

While much of *The Hungry Gene* is about the science of fat, Shell doesn't overlook environment as a critical factor in the world's obesity epidemic. It's the interplay, she argues, between genetics and environment that has created the current crisis in human waistlines. Our hunter-gatherer genes, designed to conserve energy and food to prepare for times of famine, are clashing with a modern culture of ease and plenty. To that end, she takes on car culture and the fast-food industry, a subject that has been well covered by Eric Schlosser in his bestselling *Fast Food Nation.*

Like Schlosser, Shell ends with the now-familiar call for a ban on marketing junk food to children. It's absolutely the right prescription, but one that invokes a "Yeah, right" response. This country will *never* ban Happy Meal ads on TV. Shell might have done better to suggest fighting fire with fire. Let the fast-food industry continue to market to children, but require TV stations to donate air time for anti-junk-food messages, which might, say, show what really goes into those burgers and fries. Or they might offer testimonials on the value of exercise from young people with Type 2 diabetes whose feet have been amputated. A similar requirement in the late 1960s for tobacco ads was so effective that it prompted the industry to voluntarily remove cigarette ads from television all together.

Another possibility would simply be warning labels, stickers on the side of 7-11 Double Gulps that spell out the dangers of consuming a full 64 ounces of Coke. Warning labels may seem trite on cigarettes today, but how many people really could say for sure how many calories are in a Double Gulp? (Answer: 600, almost a quarter of the proper full day's energy budget for an average male.) The food industry lobby has ferociously fought such labeling in the supermarket, a sign that this might be effective, at least for a while.

But why wait for the government to get involved? Instead, the food police at the Center for Science in the Public Interest ought to station themselves outside a busy McDonald's wearing sandwich boards that list the calorie and fat content of a large Extra Value Meal containing a Quarter Pounder with cheese (1,380 calories and 56 grams of fat). With the public duly informed about the restaurant's products, sales might plummet as people would no longer be able to delude themselves that fast food isn't *that* bad. Again, it might be only a temporary interruption, but it would accomplish what consumer groups can't afford to do now: counteract the onslaught of junk-food marketing. The media would eat up a campaign like this, and give the issue lots of free airtime. No doubt McDonald's would also respond with some ham-fisted legal action that would all but guarantee years of free fast-food bashing to come.

Shell doesn't raise the possibility of such exercises, but I'm sure she would approve. After all, they are far safer than a dose of Xenical. And she concludes that because of our genetic predisposition to amass calories, it's imperative for the U.S. and other countries to create an environment that at least makes us work a little harder for our Krispy Kremes—or shames us into avoiding them all together. ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Political Booknotes

Starr Lite

By Tony Mauro

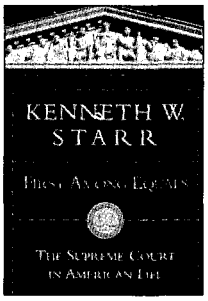
IN THE MIDDLE OF AN APPEARance before the Supreme Court in 1993, then-Solicitor General Kenneth Starr offhandedly told the justices he wanted to "share" with them the background of the case.

"Why not tell us," snapped Chief Justice William Rehnquist, always on the lookout for flabby locutions, "rather than sharing it?"

Reading Starr's book on the Supreme Court can also provoke frustration with the author as he describes, with studied evenhandedness, the Supreme Court's major cases and trends. What does Starr really think about *Bush v. Gore*, the 2000 case that decided the presidential election? And what does he think of the court's pro-state federalism juggernaut? In both instances, knowing Starr's conservative politics, one strongly suspects that he approves. But you wouldn't know it clearly from reading his text.

He calls one of Theodore Olson's pro-Bush arguments in *Bush v. Gore* "perfect," but he also calls Justice Stephen Breyer's pro-Gore dissent "eloquent." And in a labored conclusion, he leaves the reader guessing where he stands: "One is left with the impression that the Court, by virtue of its independence, remains aloof from the strong sense that it had usurped power and intruded into the province of both the states (or at least Florida) and the Congress in resolving the ultimate political question in American politics: who the president shall be." Exactly. Tell us something we didn't know.

Starr, now in a superstar private practice at Kirkland & Ellis, does occasionally fire off zingers to demonstrate that he, like President Bush, has issues with the wine-swilling Clintonites of Martha's Vineyard. He describes Justice John Paul Stevens as "a dream justice by the standards of the *New York Times* editorial board and the cultural elite," and calls Ruth Bader Ginsburg "the reliable liberal that President Clinton sought." Sandra Day O'Connor is the court's most powerful justice, in Starr's view, and Clarence Thomas "its most original thinker."



FIRST AMONG EQUALS: The Supreme Court in American Life
by Kenneth W. Starr
Warner Books, $26.95

And Starr does go a long way toward proving his thesis that the current Supreme Court, through its rulings as well as its aggressive self-image, has become the dominant branch of government. With remarkably few second thoughts, the court has elbowed Congress, the executive branch, and even state courts—as in *Bush v. Gore*—aside in a wide range of cases. The justices say somebody has to clean up the messes left by the other branches. Liberals call it judicial activism. Starr ably presents both sides of the debate, but his own verdict is harder to discern.

Starr may have held back because he still has to work with the justices in his practice. Or he may have wanted to restore his image as an honest broker. His last appearance on the public stage was highly charged. Many Washingtonians will never forgive Starr for his zeal, as Whitewater independent counsel, in detailing Bill Clinton's relationship with Monica Lewinsky. Starr's book is silent on that whole assignment.

Instead, Starr gave himself the burden of explaining how the court got to its current place in the political landscape—not justifying or attacking it. He has taken the mandate a shade too seriously, asking rhetorically at one point whether the court has placed itself above the Constitution or is making itself the supreme law of the land. "Such questions deserve an answer," Starr writes, as if he is about to provide that answer. Then he changes the subject.

TONY MAURO *is the Supreme Court correspondent for* Legal Times *and* American Lawyer Media.

Case Dismissed

By Stephen Pomper

WHEN I WAS A VERY JUNIOR lawyer in a big Wall Street firm, I dragged myself into work one day after a particularly punishing spell. As I slumped over my desk, destroyed, a senior colleague walked in and closed the door. "You have to keep things in perspective," I recall him telling me. "There used to be a saying in this trade:

1. Nobody's going to die.
2. It's only money.
3. It's not my money."

He was kidding, more or less, but within that three-part homily is much of what America hates about its lawyers.

Lawyers are like the Untouchables of the Indian caste system—handling the tasks that are too messy for others to go near. We deal with other peoples' money, fight their fights, and manage the negotiation of ugly little details that people don't want to admit actually matter. We have been known to defend the indefensible, and to file lawsuits that will not make the world a better place. We sometimes sow discord. When parties sit down to hammer out a deal, we focus on the hard issues, confronting points that have been brushed aside to preserve the illusion of backslapping bonhomie among the players. We argue over commas. And let's not even talk about fees! When you're on the way up, we make our nickel papering your mergers and acquisitions. When you're going bust, we're happy to handle the bankruptcy work. And in the end, if it all goes badly—we just move on to the next file.

If you, like Court TV's Catherine Crier, find this to be a highly regrettable state of affairs, here's some advice: Get real. Lawyers are professionals—like doctors, accountants, and teachers. As with other professions, law

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

requires the talents of bright, hard-working people who can handle really awful situations with some detachment. It's demanding work and often not a lot of fun. To be any good at it, you have to be aggressive, thick-skinned, and none too squeamish. That's a good thing, by the way. You don't want a lawyer who is repelled by ugly facts any more than you want a doctor who will go to pieces every time you show up with a scratch.

These sound like pretty obvious points, don't they? But for some reason they present a real struggle for Ms. Crier. Crier, who was a prosecutor and a judge before she burst onto the small screen, decries a world in which lawyers are not nearly enough like the role models who drew her to the profession in the first place—Atticus Finch (as played by Gregory Peck) and Clarence Darrow (as played by Spencer Tracy).

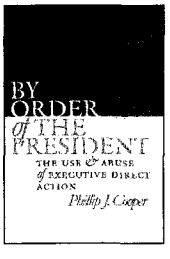
The problem, Ms. Crier tells us, is that today's lawyers don't fight for truth, justice, and the American way. Rather, they have wrought the law into an instrument of "tyranny." Tyranny, by the way, is also referred to as the "omnipotence of the rule of law," which—despite what you may have heard elsewhere—is not actually a good thing. This is because lawyers push Congress to pass wrong-headed laws, and push the courts to "legislate from the bench." Through their pushing, they have created a rule-obsessed, over-regulated, risk-averse, blame-mongering culture. You can hardly venture out of doors any more because of those damnable lawyers! For fear of being sued, nobody will rent Crier horses for her ranch. School recess is "rapidly disappearing." And the days have all but passed since Halloween was a "joyous, mischievous romp through darkened neighborhoods." "The lawyers" (as Crier refers to the entire profession, suggesting a colony of insects controlled by some malevolent overmind) are going to strangle the life out of this country. "Reliance on endless rules," Crier warns primly, "proved disastrous in the former Soviet Union."

Well, if you believe *The Case Against Lawyers*, that may be where we're headed. But I don't buy it. For one thing, Crier's facts just don't match up to reality. When I want to ride a horse (which, OK, is never), I can head down to the stables at D.C.'s Rock Creek Park and saddle up. My children report to me that recess is a thriving institution in our local schools. And I can confirm that come Halloween, the kids still show up in droves. Is our national predilection for lawsuits responsible for some perverse economic effects, some unintended consequences, some downright silliness? Yes. Some products and services no doubt have disappeared because of the costs and inefficiencies imposed by our personal-injury jurisprudence. And there's a cringe factor as well: Like Crier, I confess to being amazed that product labels remind us to do things such as remove your clothes before ironing them. But come on: In recent years, hasn't the "overlawyered" U.S. economy rather dramatically outperformed "underlawyered" economies like Japan's, notwithstanding gaps in

By Order of the President

The Use and Abuse of Executive Direct Action

Phillip J. Cooper



"A fascinating book filled with incisive analysis that leads the reader through the thicket of executive orders, proclamations, directives, and signing statements that presidents have at their disposal."—**James Pfiffner**, author of *The Strategic Presidency*

"Contains a wealth of research and insight and does an excellent job of putting these presidential actions in their political context."—**Louis Fisher**, author of *Presidential War Power*

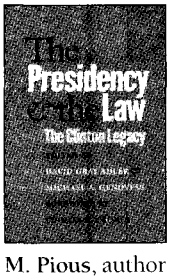
320 pages, Cloth $39.95, Paper $16.95

The Presidency and the Law

The Clinton Legacy

Edited by David Gray Adler and Michael A. Genovese

Foreword by Thomas E. Cronin



"A tour de force that is indispensable as a teaching tool and as a reference work. The authors have done a great service for their colleagues in political science and public law, and for the nation at large."—**Richard M. Pious**, author of *The Presidency*

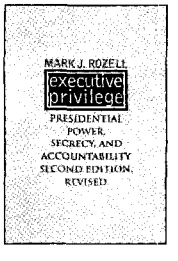
264 pages, Cloth $40.00, Paper $17.95

Executive Privilege

Presidential Power, Secrecy, and Accountability

Second Edition, Revised

Mark J. Rozell



Rozell has updated this important work to cover two new presidents, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, and show how both have revived the national debate over executive privilege.

"The definitive contemporary work on the subject."—*Journal of Politics*

232 pages, Cloth $40.00, Paper $16.95

Available from bookstores or from the press. VISA and MasterCard accepted.

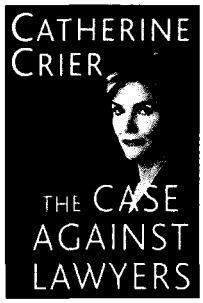
University Press of Kansas

2501 West 15th Street • Lawrence KS 66049

785-864-4154 • Fax 785-864-4586 • www.kansaspress.ku.edu

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

corporate governance that contributed to Enron, WorldCom, and similar scandals? And the threat of litigation has hardly scared American manufacturers from pumping plenty of useful, if sometimes dangerous, pro-ducts into the stream of commerce every day—at affordable prices! If you don't believe me, check out your neighborhood hardware store.



THE CASE AGAINST LAWYERS:
A Soldier's Life
by Catherine Crier
Broadway Books $23.95

That said, there are some things that people should be scared of, and here the threat of litigation can be quite helpful. Crier unintentionally provides an example. In an effort to illustrate how skittish lawyers have made us, she recounts an outing at her local golf club, where she and her husband, Christopher, found themselves boxed in by a clubmate's idling car. Christopher decided to move the car himself, when they discovered the owner's child in the backseat. Writes Crier: "We both laughed but simultaneously called out to another foursome ... 'We're not kidnapping anyone ... just moving the car.'"

Ha ha ha. Here's the thing: If Christopher did that with my car, I'd be really annoyed. If he did that and backed into, say, a water hazard, I might be annoyed enough to sue him. And if he did that and accidentally hurt my kid in the process ... why, I'd be so annoyed that I might try to sue him for everything he had. The money might not make up for my kid's suffering, or my emotional pain, but it sure would be nice to know that the next person in Christopher's position would have reason to be more careful.

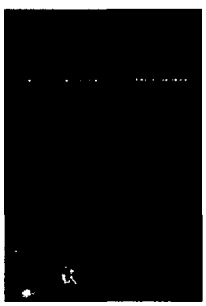
To be sure, the usefulness of punitive damages in a situation like the one I just described is something that reasonable people could disagree about, but it's something that needs to be discussed. Regrettably, this is a book that consistently comes up short on serious discussion. To give Crier her due, she identifies some interesting issues, and does so with an ideological evenhandedness that is both unusual and admirable. Some of her targets—campaign finance, special education, and prison overcrowding—will be familiar to readers of *The Washington Monthly*. Other topics—such as her soaring contempt for much of the regulatory state—will play more to the Cato Institute crowd. But even though you're bound to agree with her on some points, it's awfully hard to join her in the sentiment—at once too broad, too vague, and too extreme—that she has located a "shift away from reason and judgment, encouraged by lawyers, politicians, and the media, [that] makes me fear for our system of government." And without that narrative conceit, I defy anybody on the left, right, or center to find a cogent idea that knits this book together. Crier comes on strong but does not persuade. Next time she wants to argue a case, she should talk to a lawyer.

STEPHEN POMPER *is a lawyer who practices in Washington, D.C.*

Mountain of Evidence

By Alex Stone

AT THE TIME IT WAS CARRIED out in 1954, the CIA-sponsored coup that overthrew Guatemala's leftist president Jacobo Arbenz was heralded in Washington as a huge success. The CIA's first covert operation in Latin America, it became a model for intervention in the region for decades to come. In one of the earliest examples of a "psywar," the U.S. team fabricated intelligence and phony news reports to convince the Guatemalan military that defeat was inevitable, bluffing Arbenz out of office with a nominal show of force. Even *The New York Times* agreed to keep its correspondent off the story. After it was over, Eisenhower would praise Guatemala as a "showcase for democracy."



SILENCE ON THE MOUNTAIN
Stories of Terror, Betrayal, and Forgetting in Guatemala
by Daniel Wilkinson
Houghton Mifflin $24.00

But the inaugural ceremonies marking Arbenz's replacement with a U.S.-backed military regime had just ended when plantation workers and college students began trading their plows and textbooks for rifles and fatigues, setting out under cover of night for the hidden reaches of the mountains to prepare for the revolution.

In *Silence on the Mountain: Stories of Terror, Betrayal, and Forgetting*, Daniel Wilkinson attempts to reconstruct this history, weaving firsthand testimonies with official records into an account of how U.S. intervention sparked Guatemala's brutal 36-year civil war. Although he occasionally loses focus and gets bogged down in tedious details, Wilkinson's book hits its mark more often than not.

Within weeks of taking office in the spring of 1954, Guatemala's new leader, a dissatisfied colonel named Carlos Castillo Armas, dismantled a decade of reform, outlawing labor unions and leftist political parties. Wilkinson provides an intimate description of how the U.S.-backed regimes that came to power after the coup alienated the middle class and radicalized the left, dividing the country along class lines. As outrage mounted, more people joined the ranks of the resistance, and the countryside sank into violence and chaos. The fighting dragged on, and the elusiveness of the enemy frustrated the military. As a result, they began staging increasingly brutal assaults on civilian populations, swelling the death toll.

Ultimately, Wilkinson uncovers little information not contained in sheaves of declassified documents or in the official report made by Guatemala's "Truth Commission"—which prompted Bill Clinton to issue a formal apology. But he makes up for this deficiency with good storytelling, portraying history on a human scale through visually compelling narratives that illuminate the psychological landscape that shaped

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the revolution. Taken together, these stories form a useful counterpart to the tangled official record that exists on the subject.

The main flaw of the book is its structure—that of a voyager's diary. A young idealist on a fellowship-turned-vision quest, the author rides across Guatemala on his motorcycle conducting interviews, reading old documents, and waxing philosophic. Between each narrative, the reader suffers through pointless travel details (such as a two-page description of riding through heavy rain) and desultory reflections on the meaning of the author's personal experiences. A patchwork of meditations on history and geography is muddied by bad metaphor ("the sun ... exiting the day like a shameless diva") and fallacy ("the mountain didn't laugh with me", "the sun ... seemed to slow down so it could watch the world"). Still, it's worth trudging through these passages for insights into a history unknown to most Americans.

At the end of his journey, Wilkinson reflects, "The most effective way to bury a revolution is to render it irrelevant." Now that the end of the Cold War and the recent terrorist attacks have ushered in a new foreign policy paradigm, it's easy to dismiss the stories in Wilkinson's book—and the fragments of history they subtend—as empty relics of a bygone era.

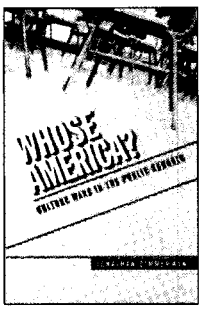
But history has a way of repeating itself. Just this May, as President Bush asked Congress for money to fight Colombia's paramilitary groups, a transcript of a conversation between House Speaker Dennis Hastert and Colombian military officials surfaced in which Hastert pledges to end the "leftist" policy of coupling human rights enforcement to military aid. In June, the government announced plans to resume drug interdiction flights over Peru—a policy that had been on hold ever since a missionary plane was accidentally shot down last year. Meanwhile, the State Department's inspector general recently conducted an investigation into America's involvement in Venezuela's failed coup. If nothing else, given the recidivist nature of U.S. policy in Latin America, Wilkinson's book deserves a certain measure of attention as a well-timed reminder of the potentially devastating consequences of our successes.

ALEX STONE *is New York writer.*

Primer Beef

By Andrew J. Rotherham

MOST PEOPLE HAVE NEVER heard of Harold Rugg, even though, for a time, he was a leading author of American textbooks and millions of Americans read his work in school. During the 1930s and 1940s, Rugg's histories inspired heated debates and denunciations because he stressed a social interpretation of history, arguing, for example, that the Founding Fathers were not detached from material interests, feared the economic consequences of "too much democracy," and questioned whether America was a "land of opportunity for all people." These and other statements were enough to incite interest groups and a host of editorial writers to action in a fight that mirrored the contemporary political disagreements about the New Deal and other Roosevelt policies. Their denunciations of and campaigns against Rugg drove him out of the textbook business altogether by the early 1940s. He's now largely forgotten.



WHOSE AMERICA:
Culture Wars in the Public Schools
by Jonathan Zimmerman
Harvard University Press, $29.95

The controversy over Rugg's work traces a pattern familiar to followers of today's school wars. Most disputes about education are not as much about children as about competing visions of American history and society. Because public schools transfer knowledge, customs, and values to future generations, fights about textbooks and curricula serve as proxies for many of society's disagreements. Almost any quarrel ostensibly about the public schools really involves an argument among adults with divergent views of the world.

Jonathan Zimmerman shines a light on these issues in *Whose America? Culture Wars in the Public Schools.* While he concludes with a proposal for détente, his own account shows that these disputes are likely to be as intractable as they are longstanding. He chronicles epic struggles during the 19th and 20th centuries waged over textbook content by such organizations as the National Association of Manufacturers and the National Education Association, as well as veterans' groups and racial and ethnic associations, all of whom had differing interpretations of events and individuals in textbooks.

He also examines controversies about prayer and sex education, which have been waged since the earliest days of public schools but which became more partisan during the second half of the 20th century. Ultimately, though, these chapters are less compelling than discussions of the study of history, not because of Zimmerman's effort but because, as he states, "different moral frameworks simply cannot be mixed into the curriculum like so many spices, enhancing its overall flavor."

All sides in these battles are guilty of using children to advance their own social agendas, a problem Zimmerman circumspectly discusses. But this is not a point that lends itself to circumspection; it is the central theme of most of the culture wars in education. The nation's educational establishment is riddled with those who believe that the role of public schools is to create a public that reflects various leftist utopian visions. Conversely, too many on the right are contemptuous of the diversity in today's America and pay only lip service to the idea of pluralism. Understanding this is key to making sense of not only the culture wars of the last century but also many of the social and political causes currently masquerading as educational policy issues.

Zimmerman's plan for unilateral disarmament in the culture wars

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

entails focusing on constant questioning and examination of events and individuals in the curriculum, an approach that flows from Zimmerman's conclusion that a compromise was reached in the textbook wars where more diverse heroes and viewpoints were included in textbooks so long as the underlying story of American greatness and progress remained unquestioned. It's a somewhat faulty assumption upon which to build a compromise, given that American greatness and progress are far from unquestioned in many influential circles in education.

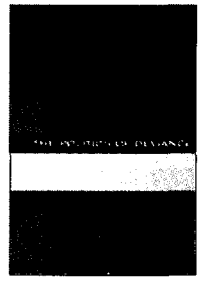
Zimmerman pointedly notes that his proposal would require radical improvement in how history teachers are trained, which, while true, is not the only drawback. Unquestioning reverence is as dangerous as an expansionist relativism that too easily teaches children nothing. A more immediate obstacle to Zimmerman's plan is that, as a practical matter, most combatants in today's school culture wars are not interested in compromise, nor do most see their claims as anything but absolute. In the case of history, only time and scholarship resolve these issues, and as soon as they are resolved, new ones crop up in their place. Especially with sex and religion, as Zimmerman shows, competing moral frameworks cannot be easily reconciled in a finite curriculum for children. It's especially hard when the disagreements are not really about children but about us.

ANDREW J. ROTHERHAM *is director of education policy at the Progressive Policy Institute.*

Disturbing Behavior

By Ana Marie Cox

LOOK CLOSELY AT THE REemerging debate over welfare reform this fall, and you'll notice that something is missing. Almost nobody outside *The Nation* bothers to argue, as many liberals once did, that federally mandated work requirements don't promote salutary civic and personal virtues. While government has always encouraged certain types of behavior and discouraged others—say, expanding mortgage-tax deductions for home-buyers—the experience of welfare reform has forced a reappraisal of what might be called legislative morality. Once limited to conservatives, the notion that government can and should promote specific moral behaviors now lies behind conversations on both the left and right, from the movement to federally fund faith-based social services to the campaign by gay activists to open the institution of marriage to same-sex couples.



THE POLITICS OF DEVIANCE:
by Anne Hendershott
Encounter, $26.95

This new consensus, however, only reopens another debate: Which values do we choose to promote. A thoughtful investigation into the limits of what our society should accept—and expect—from its members could help us navigate these choices. And such an analysis is what University of San Diego sociology professor Anne Hendershott advertises in the introduction to *The Politics of Deviance*. Calling for a "willingness to discuss behavior such as homosexuality, teenage promiscuity, adultery and addiction," Hendershott writes that we should "adopt standards of conduct that derive from reason and common sense."

Alas, this is pretty much the last evidence of either. The rest of *The Politics of Deviance* merely apes the blundering, shoddy polemics that dominate the bestseller lists today, from the paranoid rants of Ann Coulter and Bernard Goldberg on the right, to the lame hyperbole of Michael Moore on the left. Between them, these straw-man-battering tomes prove that the culture war has been fought to an odd stalemate: Both sides, eager be the underdog, pretend to have lost. That this style of argument has come to encompass even nominally academic participants like Hendershott—who has previously written a well-received book on caring for Alzheimer's patients—is distressing in its own right. That Hendershott does not notice how her own claim of victimhood undermines her advocacy of individual responsibility is doubly so.

Hendershott's belief in the power of "elites" to distort the accepted categories of normal behavior is unshakeable. Throughout her book, Hendershott argues that a recurring cast of feminists, gay-rights activists, and academics has successfully "destigmatized" deviant behaviors while, simultaneously, "redefining as crimes those behaviors they find offensive." Everything is evidence for this: the growing tolerance of homosexuality, clearly, but also the Catholic Church's pedophilia scandals. The "moral panic" behind false accusations of child abuse, and the persecution of those who would dare protest these things. The acceptance of addiction as an illness. The belief that there is such a thing as date rape. And she is not afraid to get more specific. Hendershott blames the failed manhunt for Andrew Cunanan—the murderer of Gianni Versace—on a kind of pink Trilateral Commission. Fearful of powerful gay activists, you see, law enforcement officials ignored the "plethora of clues provided by his gay lifestyle."

Still, buried deep in her invective are a few salient points. She correctly lambastes the tabloids for their tender coverage of stars' perpetual recoveries from addiction, for instance. And she finds fault with sex educators who treat teenage sexuality as simply uncontrollable rather than merely difficult to control. But sometimes these are sturdy arguments only because others have taken the time to prove them; she cites Dorothy Rabinowitz's reporting, for instance, on the spate of exaggerated or even fabricated allegations of sexual abuse in day-care centers.

For the most part, Hendershott's own evidence repeatedly undermines her central argument. She blithely glides over instances in which those powerful "special-interest groups" would seem to be working at cross

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

purposes. To take one example, she argues that omnipotent gay rights advocates have normalized pedophilia, citing as evidence the "instant credibility" of the National Man-Boy Love Association. Yet if pedophilia is so accepted, then how to explain the recent success of "feminist dissidents" in "exaggerat[ing] claims" of sexual abuse by priests? Even more to the point: how to explain the passionate public outcry in response to these claims, however exaggerated they may be?

Hendershott's thinking on the shifting definition of mental illness is no more robust. Somewhat conspiratorially, she notes that while "we are told that the mentally ill are 'normal' (or at least ubiquitous), we are also told that those with whom we may disagree"—she cites the famously xenophobic and sexist John Rocker—"are 'crazy.'" But rather than admit that this very observation is strong evidence that the power of the American Psychological Association to influence public opinion may be less than absolute, or even that something more complicated than the pulling of public strings by "elites" may be at work, Hendershott can only bleat, "It is ironic."

Hendershott's main problem is that her format doesn't allow for subtlety or ideological give-and-take. As with her rhetorical brethren (Coulter, Goldberg, Moore), Hendershott is convinced that the only way to make progress in the culture war is to maintain that you're losing. That mindset—and not "irony"—is what really explains the inconsistency of *The Politics of Deviance*. Because Hendershott objects to both sex education and the concept of date rape, it doesn't matter that the feminists who favor "'equal access to sexuality' for teenage girls" can hardly share the date-rape activists' view "that defines all men as potential rapists and all women as potential victims." All she needs to know is that the feminists are winning.

This call to the conservative mattresses, as it were, carries more emotional punch than a more nuanced critique of, say, campus sex-crime codes and courts—institutions with their roots in feminist activism, yes, and that raise civil liberties questions, yes, but that also address real concerns about the chronic underreporting of rape. Similarly, Hendershott is probably correct to contrast the massive diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder in white, upper-middle class American school children—now taking drugs for "brain dysfunction"—with the deinstitutionalization of thousands of indigent, mentally ill adults in the 1980s. But neither "mental illness chic" nor "destigmatizing" explain why the children suddenly became crazy while the adults suddenly became sane. Perhaps the difference is that the pharmaceutical companies pushing the drugs to treat ADHD know that the children are in the care of someone who can pay for treatment, while the agencies behind deinstitutionalization knew that homeless schizophrenics were not.

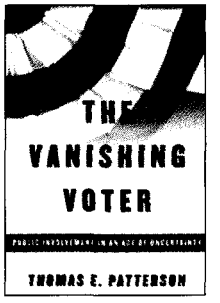
Hendershott refuses to see contradictions and paradoxes as sources of questions—not when special interest groups are the answer to everything. Which is too bad. The popularity of Hendershott's style of discourse bodes ill for the hope that disagreements are fodder for compromises—and sometimes even solutions. At a point at which we could use a guide, all Hendershott wants is a soapbox.

ANA MARIE COX *is a writer in Washington, D.C.*

Turnout Smackdown

By Brent Kendall

ONE MONTH BEFORE THE 2000 New Hampshire primary, Al Gore and Bill Bradley attempted to differentiate themselves on health care, gun control, and leadership in front of a national cable audience. At the same time, the World Wrestling Federation presented its latest installment of "WWF Smackdown!," which attracted four times as many viewers. This anecdote, recounted in Thomas Patterson's *The Vanishing Voter*, sums up the author's frustration at the level of civic interest in the United States.



THE VANISHING VOTER: Public Involvement in the Age of Uncertainty
by Thomas Patterson
Knopf, $25.00

Perhaps nothing better symbolizes American culture's secondary emphasis on community more than the public political apathy and anemic voter-participation levels of the past quarter century. Though presidential and congressional midterm election turnout among eligible voters has declined only slightly since 1972, Patterson, a professor at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, says that the confounding (and depressing) truth is that turnout hasn't increased, in spite of all the reasons participation should have grown. The 1960 Kennedy-Nixon race enjoyed a 63 percent turnout rate, while Bush-Gore limped in at 51 percent.

Political scientists have theorized that a better-educated citizenry should be a more involved one. Yet in 1960, half of the adult population hadn't finished high school, and fewer than 10 percent held a college degree, while today, one in four adults holds a degree, and another quarter have attended college in some fashion. In addition, less than one third of Southern blacks were registered for the 1960 election, and turnout among women lagged 10 percent behind that of men. Today, blacks vote at the same rate as whites, women the same as men. Throw in the 10 million registrants added to the rolls by the 1993 Motor Voter Act, and you ought to have a recipe for civic participation.

That it hasn't happened says much about our age, and it's not all bad. Only in a stable society with relative peace and prosperity do citizens have the luxury to choose civil disengagement without suffering heavy consequences. That said, Patterson argues that the process is wanting,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and faults candidates, journalists, and the political parties for a civic environment that is far from citizen-friendly. "[O]rdinary Americans share some of the blame for their lapse in participation," he writes. "But most of the fault lies elsewhere, and citizens cannot be expected to rededicate themselves merely because they are told their democracy needs them."

Patterson's book, though, isn't just another tired lament about the lameness of the American political process. It's an extension of the Vanishing Voter Project, designed to discover "what draws people to a campaign and what keeps them away." Patterson's suggestions for improving the electoral process are distilled from analysis of 80,000 interviews project workers conducted with citizens during the 2000 presidential campaign. Many of the project's findings aren't new or surprising; they're just backed by more extensive data. The public finds the campaign long and tedious. When media coverage of the race decreases, public interest decreases. People would rather hear candidates in their own words than pundits talking about them. They believe special interests drive the political process. They think the Electoral College is unfair.

Patterson calls upon the parties to make the primary season shorter and create a system that permits more states to have a real voice in selecting nominees. He says the media should remain skeptical, but should also give politicians credit when it is due, and calls upon the networks to televise extended one-on-one candidate interviews. And he argues that states should lengthen poll hours and make the registration process more voter-friendly.

Many of his suggestions would surely benefit the process, but even Patterson admits that his prescriptions can do only so much to enliven democratic involvement. He concedes that, at the core, healthy turnout is inextricably linked to voter motivation. If citizens don't care enough to vote, the level of procedural ease and efficiency won't matter. Patterson argues that the lower level of today's political stakes has naturally reduced people's interest in politics. He suggests that absent deep social problems, the parties have ceased to argue big ideas, and now largely battle over the means to reach mutually agreed-upon ends. Bush and Gore both wanted to fund a prescription-drug benefit program, but W. aimed to spend $158 billion to Gore's $253 billion—not exactly differences that lead to shouting across America's dinner tables. There's also a generational aspect. "The civic-minded generation raised during the Depression and the Second World War has been gradually replaced by the more private-minded X and Y generations that lived through childhood and adolescence without having experienced a great national crisis," he writes.

Last fall's terrorist attacks may have given younger citizens their own taste of national crisis, but Patterson seems to doubt that the event will spark long-term enthusiasm for public involvement. His prediction is proving prescient: This July, after Patterson's book was headed to the printer, the Center for the Study of the American Electorate released a report on early 2002 primary turnouts, and the numbers weren't good. "Someday it would be nice to report something other than gloom and lament—that somebody was doing something commensurate with the scope needed to reclaim the vitality of American democracy," said Curtis Gans, the committee's director.

The lack of crisis issues has helped to foster the ultimate Me generation, in which the pursuit of new cars, smaller cell phones, and home theater equipment are national pastimes. Not challenged by salient, galvanizing issues, Americans have transformed themselves from the world's democrats into what the *Financial Times* labeled its "consumers of last resort."

But just like advertising, certain consumers are targeted more than others. Those who aren't swing voters count less, and consequently, often care less. Such voter alienation hasn't been helped by the paternalistic condescension from today's leading politicians. A few years back, Thomas Friedman said that when it comes to leadership, we live in "an age of midgets." He wasn't referring to Bush and Gore, but he might as well have been. Patterson says both tried to sell their policy proposals by talking down to their audience. When a computer program designed to assess textbook reading levels was applied to the 2000 debates, it found that Bush and Gore addressed the public on a 10th-grade level, two grades below that of the Kennedy-Nixon debates and three below the national education average.

The problem is that strong, dynamic leadership requires taking risk; without it, those charged with leading do little more than supervise. James Carville was speaking about the choreographed nature of national political conventions when he said "boring is good," but the play-it-safe attitude produces precisely the type of midgets that Friedman laments. As for the conventions, the boring-is-good strategy has produced the most underwhelming of ratings, with only 13 percent of TV households watching the average minute of prime-time debate coverage in 2000.

Patterson closes *The Vanishing Voter* with more optimism, musing that the next few elections might see an upturn in participation, in part from improved civic attitudes since September 11. And for all the misery of the 2000 election mess, it did remind people that their votes count; a CNN poll after the election showed that most people who hadn't voted wished they had. Perhaps the biggest incentive is that this fall's races could produce dramatic changes in Washington's balance of power. Regardless of the turnout in November or in 2004, Patterson warns that without effort, long-term momentum won't be sustained, concluding that "no stone should be left unturned in the effort to bring Americans back to the polls." Unfortunately, those stones are more akin to boulders, and at present, the nation is bereft of political heavy lifters.

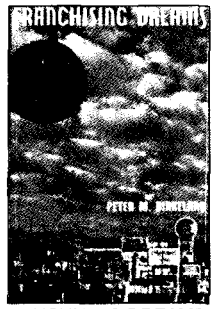
BRENT KENDALL *is a* Washington Monthly *intern.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Chain Store Blues

By Amia Srinivasan

A FEW YEARS AGO, WALTER, A 50-something milkman, dreamed of one day owning and running his own business—getting rich and being his own boss. He also had a practical plan: Walter was going to buy a car-repair franchise. A franchise seemed just the ticket, promising a "95-percent success rate" and the security of a major trademark and corporate backing—critical for someone with no experience in the field. So Walter scrounged together all of his money to buy the franchise, ready to join the ranks of the nation's entrepreneurial class.



FRANCHISING DREAMS: The Lure of Entrepreneurship in America
by Peter Birkeland
University of Chicago Press, $22.50

But a few years later, author Peter M. Birkeland finds Walter nostalgic for his milk-delivery days. With unreliable labor, Walter is in his shop constantly, missing family events like his niece's Saturday wedding. With high staff turnover, he finds himself behind the counter, at the receiving end of the wrath of unsatisfied customers. And the corporation that promised to help Walter is nowhere in sight; Walter calls his competitors down the street to figure out how to run his business. Despite the fact that Walter owns a franchise unit under one of the most successful companies in America, he is continually on the verge of failure.

Instead of a successful entrepreneur, Walter has become a character in *Franchising Dreams*, Birkeland's three-year case study of this steadily growing form of business activity. Birkeland begins by telling us that currently 2,000 companies in 75 industries manage 400,000 franchises, and the numbers continue to grow. But Birkeland takes a closer look at these impressive figures, examining the daily workings of franchises and the challenges endemic to the business. From working on the frontline of franchise units and attending countless trade shows and expositions, to interviewing franchisees and CEOs, Birkeland exposes franchising for the cutthroat, competitive, and often disillusioning world it is. He begins by exploding the myth of the 95-percent survival rate for new franchises' success, figuring that the success rate of new franchises is closer to 25 percent.

To make his point, Birkeland examines three different franchises, which he dubs King Cleaners, Star Muffler, and Sign Masters. Interviews with franchisees as well as franchisers are revealing, invariably reflecting the disillusionment that apparently settles into most franchise owners within weeks. One such person tells Birkeland, "I was naive when I bought this. I thought it'd be really cool to own my own business. Well, I'm 27 and I'll be broke by the time I'm 30."

Indeed, after about 20 pages of *Franchising Dreams*, the book turns into an updated version of John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, set in car-repair shops and cramped printing offices in small-town America. Birkeland demonstrates the numerous obstacles that stand in the franchisee's path to success. Despite the rhetoric of help from the corporations ("Work for yourself not by yourself" is the motto of one of the franchises), most franchisees are left to fend for themselves after a few days of initial training, often leading them, like Walter, to seek help from competitors. Other challenges include the difficulty of finding reliable employees, whimsical customers, and the corporation's insistence that the chain stores strictly adhere to the corporate formula, regardless of the local environment—a denial of the flexibility most small, independently owned businesses desperately need. For instance, when certain Star Muffler franchisees complained that their units' opening hours were not compatible with local consumers' shopping patterns, they were still not allowed to deviate from the corporate strictures, even when this might have increased their profit margins.

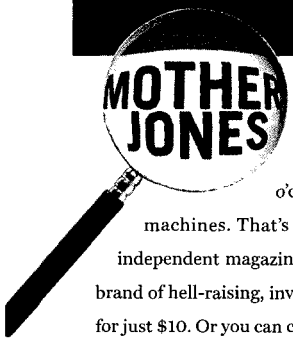
The corporations also encourage the franchisees to cannibalize one another by refusing to give them exclusive territories, which not only oversaturates particular markets but also sets franchisees—otherwise probable allies in a system weighted against them—permanently at odds.

Birkeland does find a few success stories, which brighten up the book's otherwise rather bleak findings. But for the most part, while the benefits of franchising are clear from the corporate side—growth with no risk and the use of what the Sign Masters' CEO refers to as "OPM" (other people's money)—they are harder to see from the franchisee end. The American dream of entrepreneurship traps ambitious but naive men and women in a system that forces them to assume all the risk of corporate expansion with few of the benefits. Birkeland, however, does propose a remedy. He suggests that individual franchisees could wield immense power if they banded together to negotiate better arrangements with their corporate superiors. But this sort of collectivist outlook runs contrary to the individualism that motivates franchisees in the first place.

Birkeland's book originated as his dissertation at the University of Chicago, and the book's origins are still glaringly apparent. Although free from the usual turgid academic prose, the narrative is held to a tight focus, and Birkeland never comments on the issues normally raised about this rapidly growing segment of industry. The implications of the changing nature of American entrepreneurship, the effects of franchising on the American economic and social landscape, and the predictions of the future are all outside the realm of *Franchising Dreams*. But answering these questions was never Birkeland's intention. Rather, he wrote the book to provide an inside look at the operations of franchising on the daily level; and by doing so, he has provided a cautionary tale for those seeking their fortune behind the counters of the nation's chain stores.

AMIA SRINIVASAN *is a Washington Monthly intern.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

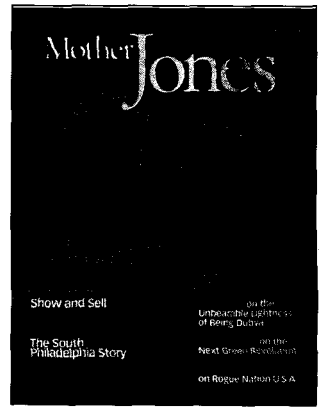


THE REST IS JUST MASS MEDIA

It's always bothered you that the same people selling you the six o'clock news could also be selling you television sets or washing machines. That's why you should try *Mother Jones*—one of the last remaining independent magazines on earth. Order a risk-free copy today. If you like our unique brand of hell-raising, investigative journalism, you can get 5 more issues (a full year in all) for just $10. Or you can cancel and owe nothing. Either way, the trial issue is yours to keep.

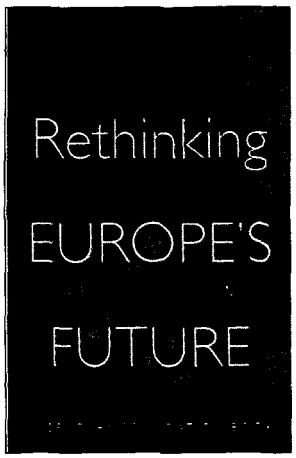
SUBSCRIBE TO A DIFFERENT POINT OF VIEW. CALL 1-800-GET-MOJO.

Please refer to promotion code A071WM



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Thinking Allowed



Rethinking Europe's Future

David P. Calleo

Rethinking Europe's Future is a major reevaluation of Europe's prospects as it enters the twenty-first century. Summoning the insights of history, political economy, and philosophy, David Calleo explains why Europe was for a long time the world's greatest problem and how the Cold War's bipolar partition brought stability of a sort. Without the Cold War, Europe risks revisiting its more traditional history. No one, Calleo believes, can pretend to predict the future with assurance. Calleo's book ponders how to think about this future.

A Century Foundation Book

Cloth $24.95 ISBN 0-691-09081-5 Due October

New in paperback

Spiritual Marketplace

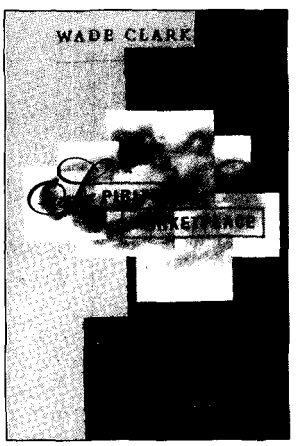
Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion

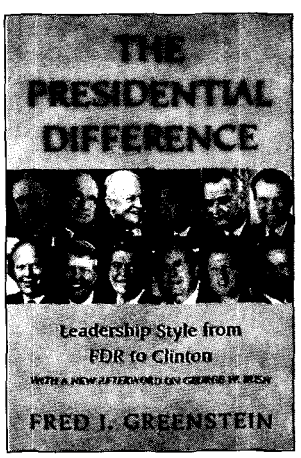
Wade Clark Roof

Drawing on surveys and in-depth interviews, Wade Clark Roof reports on the religious and spiritual styles, family patterns, and moral vision and values for "baby boomers" today. The result is an innovative, engaging approach to understanding how religious life is being reshaped as Americans move into a new century.

"Roof's work thoughtfully articulates the introspective fluidity of the baby-boom generation."—*Publishers Weekly*

Paper $16.95 ISBN 0-691-08996-5





New paperback edition

With a new afterword on George W. Bush

The Presidential Difference

Leadership Style from FDR to Clinton

Fred I. Greenstein

Drawing on a quarter-century's work, Fred I. Greenstein, one of our keenest observers of the modern presidency, provides a fascinating and instructive account of the qualities that have served well and poorly in the Oval Office from Franklin D. Roosevelt's first hundred days to the beginning of George W. Bush's presidency.

"Illuminating.... A perceptive view of the leadership qualities and the events that shaped the triumphs and tragedies of the modern presidency."
—Phil Gailey, *New York Times*

Paper $16.95 ISBN 0-691-09083-1

Princeton University Press 800-777-4726 • WWW.PUP.PRINCETON.EDU

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED